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Seven
of the best
bibshorts



p42

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support? Team-
based road
bikes

P100 Bush biking
adventure in Oz



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THIS MONTH

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DO THIS...

Bike away from the beaten track

It's the perfect time of year to really embrace byways and explore some hidden, quiet roads, lanes and cycle paths. With a little planning you can take your rides away from major routes and off the beaten track

With modern lives becoming increasingly hectic, a little respite from the hustle and bustle of the main roads and cities is always welcome. Exploring more remote scenery aboard a hybrid or a mountain bike is possibly the best tonic we can think of.

Sustainable transport charity Sustrans has been celebrating its 20th birthday throughout the year so far with a number of events, reminding us how hard it has worked to develop the National Cycle Network, linking up towns and cities around the UK. So let's get out and use them!

www.sustrans.org.uk

www.tfl.gov.uk/modes/cycling/

www.ctc.org.uk

www.britishcycling.org.uk

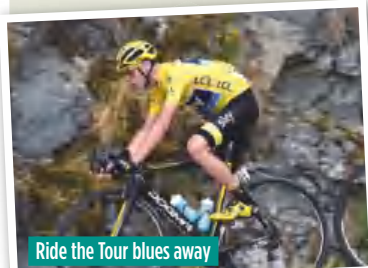


- 1) Royal Albert CC – 1872
- 2) Leek Cyclist's Club – 1876
- 3) Canterbury CC – 1877

IN

Icy drinks

Pop your water bottle in the freezer half-filled with water, then simply remove and top-up when you're heading out on a hot day.



Ride the Tour blues away

Tour blues

We've all probably spent three weeks rushing home to enjoy the day's Tour de France highlights — now it's all over, we'll have to get out and ride instead!

Pub ride

It's obligatory at this time of year to gather some ride mates and pedal to a beer garden for some well-earned pub grub.

Cycling holiday

Even if you can't take your bike abroad, look into hiring one and keep the legs turning while you're away this summer.

Poor posture

Recent studies claim that good posture can improve self-esteem as well as the physical benefits, so walk tall and sit up straight!



Scabby knees

The makers of widely available skin products claim that by keeping a wound moist throughout the healing process, any scarring will be significantly reduced.

Comfort food

If weight loss is on your agenda, summer is the perfect time to enjoy alfresco dining with a fresh summer salad. Sociable and good for your waistline.

Plain kit

Florals are on trend this season — yes, even on Lycra! Morvelo has made sure we need never look boring again on the bike with its bold collection.



OUT



Back to the future

Evans Cycles announces commitment to get the UK back to 1940s cycling peak

In July, specialist retailer Evans Cycles announced its commitment to get the number of UK cycling journeys back up to the healthy figures seen in the 1940s.

With this heyday seeing 14.7 billion miles covered by bike, Evans Cycles launched a 1940s-themed cycling experience as part of the initiative, with its Waterloo Cut store bedecked in a vintage theme.

The bike chain is now calling for support to make cycling safer and more accessible as it champions the potential of pedal power for all journeys.

The commuting decade

The 40s was a decade that saw 20 per cent of commutes being made by bike. While it's hard to argue that cycling is in a pretty healthy place for participation, there's still plenty of work to be done. Figures show that only four per cent of commutes are currently made by bike, with a figure of 3.25 billion miles being covered annually by bicycles across the UK.

Evans Cycles marketing director James Backhouse says the retailer predicts that based on current growth we could be back to this peak by 2030, given a 10 per cent year-on-year average sales increase over the past decade.

Backhouse said:

"In order to boost health and fitness across the UK we need to make all sport safe and accessible. We're calling for an increased investment in cycling infrastructure, a focus on improving cycle safety and a continued commitment to reducing traffic on the roads in order to help the UK become a true cycling nation once again.

Biking benefits

"We want Britain to reap all the benefits the sport has to offer. While 2030 might seem an ambitious target, we should look at the Netherlands where cycling has been transformed in less than 20 years and 27 per cent of commutes are now made by bike. We know what is possible with the right investment and support."

105 miles is the full distance
of the North Wales
Coastal Route from
Holyhead to Chester

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serving

1955
the year Brian Robinson
became the first British man
to finish the Tour de France



RIDE TO LIVE

Bishop Ed Condry

Occupation: Bishop of Ramsbury

Age: 61

**Riding: Pashley Roadster
Sovereign**

I decided to travel by bike and public transport instead of the car during Lent because I wanted to do something positive rather than give up something. I love cycling and am concerned about climate change. I believe we have a responsibility to future generations. Talking to CA gives me chance to spread the message.

I rode 30 miles per day on average with the longest ride 80 miles. I had to spend a lot of time planning routes and making calculations of time, and had to arrive looking reasonably smart. I carried my five foot Bishop's staff, which I strapped to the top tube, and my cassock and mitre in Ortlieb panniers. It must all have weighed between seven and eight kilos.

I had to drive twice during Lent, to visit a friend in a care home and to a funeral. It seemed silly to put principle above friendship and kindness. But the cycling has made me think seriously about video conferencing for work and I'm trying to persuade more vicars to cycle. The usual response is perplexed incomprehension! Cycling is one of the places I go to clear my mind which is important to my ministry. And it's wonderful seeing a badger cross the road or deer in a field while I'm cycling back late at night.

We have some serious hills in Wiltshire. My favourite is the best road in the world — the route from Wylie to Dinton over a ridge. From the top you can see Stonehenge. The climb is one in five and if you like hills as I do, it's great. I have several bikes including a 1957 Raleigh Superbe, a Dawes Galaxy tourer, the Pashley, a Brompton and a unicycle. If I manage five metres on the unicycle I'm doing really well!

Wiltshire is very rural and we have a lot of club-type cyclists but not many families or commuting cyclists. The roads are not wide and drivers drive fast, sometimes 12-18 inches from my elbow, without slowing down. I'm hoping that new legislation will lead to more provision for cycling in rural areas.

I love long-distance cycling with friends. In 2012 we rode from Olympia in Greece to the Olympic Park in London which was about 1,500 miles. We're now planning to cycle from the North Cape, Norway's most northerly point, back to Wiltshire, a trip of about 2,500 miles.





Fat Lad at the Back Bobby Dazzler jersey £59.99

Along with its standout design, the Bobby Dazzler jersey uses a patented Pixel 300 reflective fabric on the sleeves. The tiny glass beads on the fabric reflect directly back at the light source, which, according to the Fat Lads, means you should be lit up like a Christmas tree. www.fatladattheback.com



TomTom Multi Sport Cardio GPS Watch £209.99

This great looking watch from TomTom reminds us of a Tour King of the Mountains jersey with its white and red design. It comprises all the usual speed and tracking features of a GPS watch but with an innovative optical LED heart rate monitor that reads from your wrist. Nifty. www.tomtom.com



Topeak tyre pressure gauge £24.99

Maintaining the correct tyre pressures is the first step to ensuring consistent handling and will go a long way towards keeping you safe as well as helping to prevent pinch-flats. Measuring down to increments of just one psi, Topeak's pressure gauge enables you to dial in the right pressure with both ease and accuracy. www.extrauk.co.uk



Tranzbag Road 129.90 CHF (approx £87)

Whether it's riding straight from the airport or obeying train rules, the Tranzbag road bike bag could be the answer to travelling on public transport with your bike. Weighing just 290g and packing down small enough to fit in your rear pocket, the Tranzbag means going by bike has just got a lot easier. www.tranzbag.com



50 shades of graze T £28

This fun T-shirt is designed by Otilie Quince, a double World and European transplant cycling champion. After receiving a life-saving kidney transplant from her mother in 2007, she was told she could no longer play football. She now competes for the Great Britain Transplant cycling team, which she also captains. www.otilliequince.com/p/oq.html?m=1



Funkier bibshorts £49.99

Funkier clothing has expanded its ladies' collection and these women-specific bibshorts are extremely comfortable in use, with no sausage legs in sight and a comfy cross-back strap system keeping things in place nicely. Available in five sizes, a single-strap bib design is also available. www.bob-elliot.co.uk



Dermalex Repair £18.99

Do you find yourself flushed long after your ride finishes? Dermalex Rosacea is a clinically proven skin repair cream that promises to reduce 95 per cent of redness, while soothing the other symptoms of rosacea, including flushing, spider veins and dry skin. It also claims to help the skin activate its own repair mechanism. www.boots.com



Catlike Mixino Helmet £169.99

If it's good enough for the guys at the Movistar WorldTour pro cycling team then this distinctive Mixino helmet is good enough for us. It's pretty light, weighing in at 232g on our scales, and is good for the summer months, with 39 vents and internal channels to keep you cool however hot the sun gets. www.i-ride.co.uk



GoPro Hero4 Session £329.99

Capturing our rides has never been easier, with increasing amounts of technology at our fingertips, especially with GoPro's new Hero4 Session camera. Waterproof, and with share via bluetooth and wireless capabilities, the Hero4 can produce high-quality action footage at up to 1080p at 60fps. Brilliant. www.madison.co.uk



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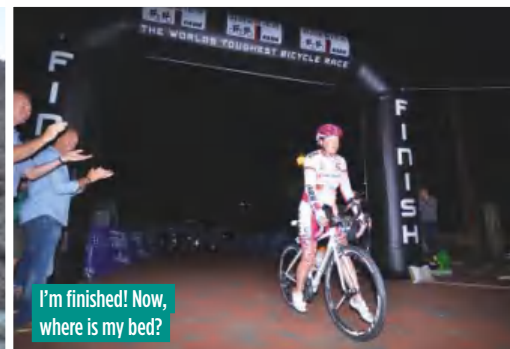
schwalbe.co.uk



Keeping cool in soaring heat



Fiery deserts and sleep deprivation tested Shu



I'm finished! Now, where is my bed?

Shu Pillinger becomes the first British woman to complete the Race Across America solo, in scorching weather

Simon Schofield

After shivering through a British winter followed by a cold spring, keeping cool while cycling in the heat may seem like a nice problem to have.

But for one pioneering rider, scorching temperatures nearly ruined her lifetime ambition. Shu Pillinger, 39, has just become the first British solo woman ever to complete the ultra-gruelling Race Across America.

It's hard to describe just how big a challenge this is — it's 3,004 miles, coast to coast, through

mountains and deserts, and Pillinger made it in just over 12 days and nine hours. That means she clocked up a little shy of 250 miles every single day, getting by on just two hours sleep per day in three naps.

Pillinger swallowed a tiny thermometer so that her support team could keep an eye on her core temperature. In the California desert, however, what seems like an extreme measure paid off.

"It was about seven degrees higher than last year and I was overheated at one point and had

to be taken off the road to be cooled down by my team. My body temperature went up to about 39.5°C," she said.

It was the second year in succession that Pillinger had attempted what many consider to be the pinnacle of extreme endurance cycling. Last time she crashed, breaking a collarbone, and had to withdraw after completing more than two thirds of the distance.

But this time Pillinger's problems were more psychological than physical, with fatigue and sleep deprivation causing hallucinations during what she called her "witching hour". They included some nasty looking goblins.

"It's weird, but once you've seen it, you're not quite as shocked. None of them look particularly friendly. A lot of them are ugly looking," she said.

Only 273 people have ever completed the race solo since its inception in 1982 — 35 of the finishers were women, and none have been solo British females.

"There aren't many things you can be first at these days, and when I found out that no British woman had completed this solo before, it got stuck in my head," said Pillinger. "The more I looked into it, the more I realised it was possible."

Making short work of skirt quandary

Hannah Bussey

Cycling while wearing a skirt or dress is not always the most modest affair, however, Penny in Yo'pants is a concept that's trying to make it easier.

The idea came from a workshop at Scottish Cyclehack — an event that looks at the issues around women, cycling and marketing, to try to solve the barriers preventing people cycling.

The aim is to help women across the globe get on bikes, no matter what their dress code, especially where cultural or religious traditions mean skirts must be worn.

The initial invention featured a penny and an elastic band, designed to make skirts bikeable. The penny is placed on one side of the skirt, with the band then looped around it from the other side, to create an ad-hoc pair

of shorts. Their short 'how to' film was so successful it went viral.

A more refined version of the penny and elastic band has since been designed for sale, made of an aluminium coin and leather puck. Launched via a crowdfunding initiative, their first batch has already sold out, with part of the £5 cost going to the women's cycling team in Afghanistan for training and development.

Penny in Yo'Pants founder Johanna Holtan said she has distributors and retailers already lined up and expects the second batch of products to arrive in the next month or so. With its unique role and charitable cause we expect these to fly off the shelf.

Visit www.pennyinyourpants.co.uk for all the details, including more information on the Afghan women's Cycling Team.



Clever gadget turns skirts into shorts



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Don't blame it on the sunshine

Simon Schofield

Sunburn is a big hazard for cyclists. Of course it's preventable and most cyclists will slap on the suntan lotion. But sweat and time can degrade the effects of sun cream and one of the biggest problems with getting sunburned is that by the time you notice, it's nearly always too late. So could the new bit of wearable technology being developed by scientists in Belfast become a summer ride essential?

Researchers at Queen's University are developing a plastic with some clever properties. It contains 'smart ink' which is capable of interpreting the effects of UV solar radiation (the stuff that burns you) and alerting you to the danger of burning before it happens.

The plastic, which could be worn as a bracelet or a band, is blue in colour initially.

If it turns transparent, it's time to seek shade or more protection from a sunscreen.

"The sunlight, or the total UV component, is collected throughout the day so the user is aware of the total dose of the harmful irradiation received by the band and is warned when it nears the level that causes sunburn.

"This simple and inexpensive sunburn indicator should warn people when they are receiving too much of the UV component of sunlight, and prompt them to seek shade," said Dr David Hazafy, the lead scientist behind the idea.

Sweating buckets is no bad thing

Simon Schofield

It's a common belief that sweating while exercising indicates a lack of fitness, poor health and overweight. But the truth is, the more we sweat, the better condition we are likely to be in.

"Actually, after repeated training your body becomes more efficient at cooling, so you start to sweat earlier and produce a greater volume of sweat," says Dr Nick

Gant of Loughborough University. "So, in fact, the fitter you are, the more you should sweat."

And the more you sweat, the better you will perform. It's often thought that under-performance in hot conditions is caused by dehydration. But according to South African researchers, this is another myth. "The theory of dehydration limiting performance in the heat is completely bogus," says Dr Ross

Tucker of the University of Cape Town. The drop-off in performance is caused by the body not cooling sufficiently. And sweating is the body's method of cooling down.

Despite the 'dehydration myth' you should continue to drink plenty while riding in the heat because without regular liquid intake the body won't have enough spare fluid to generate the sweat that cools you down.





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Hot ride tips

Simon Schofield

With the hottest Grand Tour of the season coming up, the riders in the Vuelta a España will be doing everything in their power to try to keep cool. We might not get the searing heat of inland Spain, but ordinary mortals need to keep cool too — here are a few of our favourite tips.

If it's really hot, the night before your ride mix up your bidons to about three-quarters capacity and store them in the freezer. Top them up just before you go. The drink will melt gradually but be lovely and cool. If it's not absolutely roasting, just do it with one bottle and store the other in the fridge.

If you can find natural running water like a stream or a river, stop and plunge your arms in up as far as your elbows and leave them there for a good few minutes. There's lots of blood flowing through the big arteries here and you will cool quickly. A bowl of cold water in a pub or a cafe sink will do a similar job.

Swap 500ml bottles for 750ml ones and use an electrolyte tablet or powder. The electrolytes will help the body hang on to liquid more efficiently. Make sure your recovery drink includes protein — it's better than a carb-only drink for rehydrating.

Photo: Getty Images



Garmin Varia

Best known for cycling computers and satellite navigation, Garmin has just added cycling safety to its palmarès. The Varia Bike Radar and Smart Light system is, according to Garmin, a world first in offering riders a rear view radar that detects vehicles approaching from up to 140 metres away, including other cyclists if they are travelling at a much greater speed than you.

Using a wireless rear transmitter, the radar detects incoming traffic and provides both the driver and rider with

awareness of each other by increasing the intensity and flashing of the rear light as the vehicle draws near, while simultaneously alerting the rider of incoming traffic, thanks to the display unit, or compatible Garmin Edge bike computers. The display unit will also notify the rider of multiple vehicles and their relative closing speed.

An upgrade to the whole Smart Lights system includes a front light that automatically adjusts the brightness depending on your speed — projecting the light further as you ride faster. If paired with the light-sensing Edge 1000, the

front beam will also brighten or fade depending on light.

An option to purchase a second rear light means left and right signals are also available, via the remote control button that comes in the full package — although it should be noted that this is complementary to hand signals as per the UK Highway Code.

Prices start at £159.99 for the basic Bike Radar system; the whole Smart system, which includes the front light display and remote, is priced at £239.99. Further rear lights cost £59.99. See www.madison.co.uk for more and a full list of retailers.



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KAYE'S TOOLBOX TIPS

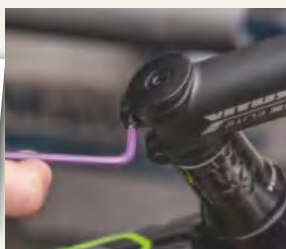


CA's resident mechanic Kaye Patton is able to fix pretty much anything

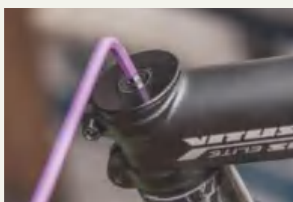
Most modern bike forks and handlebars are secured using a threadless assembly that clamps the stem and bars to the fork and the frame.

Bearings are pressed into the top and bottom of the head tube. The assembly is clamped together and if it's done correctly a threadless headset should give months if not years of trouble-free cycling. Now and again, however, some slack may develop or you may want to adjust the stem height or alignment.

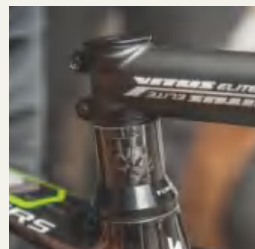
Adjusting your headset



1 There are two pinch-bolts on the side of the stem. These clamp the stem to the steerer. Before you do anything to the assembly, you need to undo these bolts.

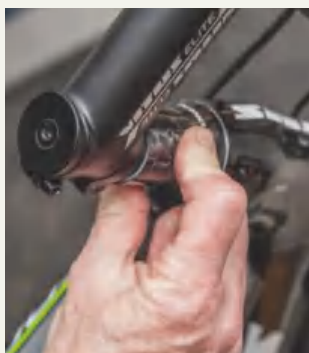


2 The top cap houses a long Allen bolt that attaches to a star fangled washer inside the fork steerer. Doing this bolt up pushes the stem and spacers onto the top bearing race. It just needs to be tight enough to comfortably seat the stem and spacers onto the top bearing.

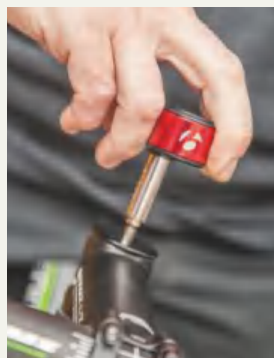


3 Spacers are located under the stem and sometimes above it too. These can be removed or swapped around to alter the height of the stem.

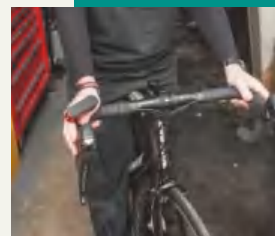
4 To remove the stem, undo the pinch-bolts. Then undo the top cap bolt and remove it and the top cap. The stem should slide up and off the fork steerer. Carefully rest the stem and bars as they can unexpectedly drop down and scratch the frame.



5 Spacers can be swapped out with the stem removed. If you are taking a spacer out, put it back on top of the stem. Make sure the level of the steerer is slightly below the top edge of the spacer as that is what the top cap pushes down upon.



6 Slide the stem back onto the steerer and reinsert the long bolt and top cap. Do up the top-cap bolt until it binds plus a quarter of a turn, no more.



7 Align the bars by sighting along the length of the bike with the front wheel between your legs. Lightly pushing down on the stem, tighten the pinch-bolts. Do not overtighten them, especially if any of the parts are carbon-fibre. Use a torque wrench if you have one, and tighten to the figure marked on the stem.

TIME TAKEN
5 MINUTES

TOOLS FOR THE JOB

■ Allen keys (usually 4mm and 5mm)

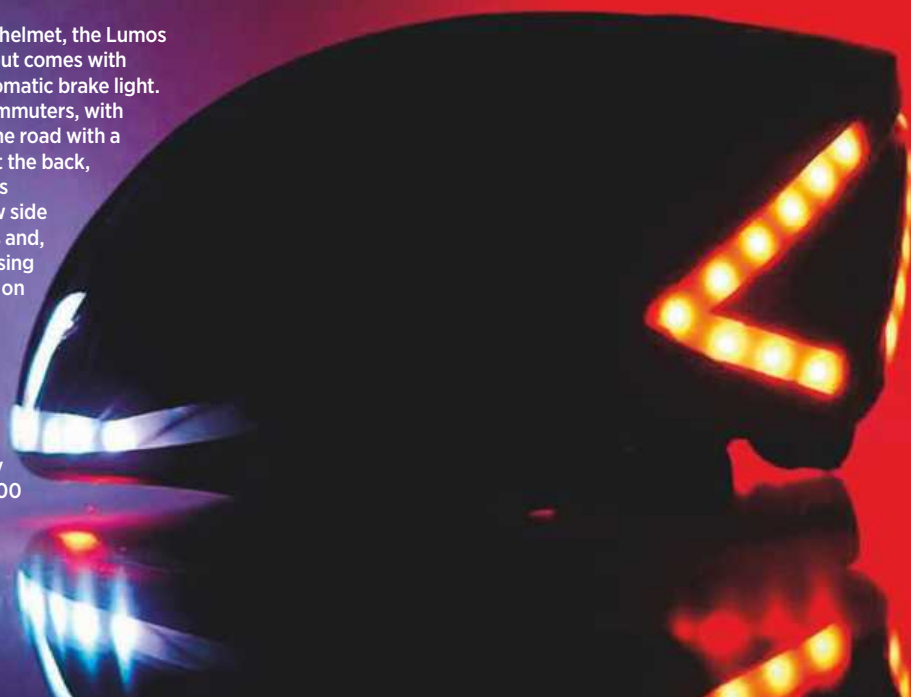
Lumos's bright idea

Pitched as the next generation bike helmet, the Lumos may look like an average helmet, but comes with integrated lights, including an automatic brake light.

Lumos says the helmet is ideal for commuters, with an aim to increase a rider's visibility on the road with a constant front white light and red light at the back, arranged in a triangle formation. Wireless remotes on the handlebars trigger yellow side indicators that complement hand signals and, thanks to an onboard accelerometer sensing when you slow down, automatically turn on a set of bright red rear brake lights.

Promising to be water resistant, the helmet also has an integrated USB-rechargeable battery that Lumos claims will last for up to three-and-a-half hours between charges.

Currently still in project form, the July Kickstarter campaign reached its \$125,000 target in just 12 hours, enabling the concept to be turned into a mass-market helmet. Production is due to start in January next year, with delivery from April 2016 onwards.
www.lumoshelmet.com



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FROM THE ED



“An inspiration to us all”

Next month a bunch of riders will set off on a four-day ride taking them across Kent and the Channel, around some burning tyres in Calais (possibly) and down through northern France to Paris.

The four-day London to Paris (L2P) ride has become one of the most popular multi-day events. Covering 500 kilometres of moderately testing terrain, the L2P combines a challenging ride with a start and a finish in two of the great capital cities.

Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research is the charity behind the L2P this September 17-21. We have already featured some of the riders signed up for the ride, and they will come together in September, joined by deputy editor Rebecca Charlton and fitness editor Hannah Reynolds.

Many of the 250 participants have a close relationship with the charity, either having suffered from cancer or lost a relationship or friend to the disease. Their stories are inspiring and their determination to train for the ride and finish it is an example to all cyclists.

Our cover feature this month looks at ways to enjoy and complete a multi-day ride. Cycling for a few days with no breaks is quite a different experience to a big one-day ride. There are physical and mental aspects that can surprise, and not always in a good way if you go in unprepared.

This is my last issue of *Cycling Active*. I've had the dream job working on the magazine from issue one through to 76, and it's been an incredible privilege to share my love of all things cycling with you. See you up the road!



Luke

Luke Edwardes-Evans Editor

Inbox

Write to us at

cyclingactive@ipcmedia.com

Time to shine

Having cycled reasonably seriously in my twenties, I switched to running in my thirties and early forties because it fitted more easily around my career and home life. Then in my late forties an endless string of injuries caused me to rediscover my love of road biking again.

My competitive urge hadn't gone away and so earlier this year, at the age of 51, I started time trialling.

In five out of six of my first races I managed podium places and in my last race I was third, 30 seconds behind a talented young hill-climb champ whose parents were younger than me!

It is usually middle-aged men who get all the attention for wearing Lycra, but it has been great to see how many fit and dedicated middle-aged women there are who are regular and passionate time triallers.

It has also been a real joy to join the Veterans Time Trialling Association which provides an incentive for us 'old timers' to keep setting new age category records. Seeing riders still 'flying' well into their seventies and beyond will encourage me for many years to come.

Chris Melia, email

Many happy revolutions

My wife was 70 on July 3 this year and we unusually share the same birthday, mine being my 71st. We are regular gym goers and enjoy going to the classes.

I asked her earlier in the year what she would like to do for her birthday and rather than go anywhere in the world or do a cruise she opted for a challenge instead...

So, eight weeks ago we went into our new village cycle shop and bought two hybrids and started training over the Yorkshire Wolds. We have just returned from the most wonderful experience, cycling from the top of the Brenner Pass near Innsbruck to Venice, 450km over eight



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Inspiring cyclist
Gary Harris

Back in the saddle

I was reading the inspiring story of Gary Harris using cycling to help recover from a brain tumour and it has shown me how lucky I am. I was 15 when my eyesight and poor energy levels stopped me from cycling when I was diagnosed as a brain tumour in the pituitary gland. I was successfully treated with chemotherapy and subsequently began cycling again. I was welcomed into the local club and have made some great friends and rekindled my love of cycling.

Keith McMath, email



Letter of the month wins a pair of Shimano R107 cycling shoes worth £99.99!

magical days, albeit in conditions rather warmer than Yorkshire — it was 36° on four of the days and now we're hooked!

Roger Hobson, email

Unseen Welsh wonder

I am not the type of cyclist who sets out to find hills to climb. I don't try to avoid them either.

Your magazine features articles about rides all over the UK and Europe. Last May myself and four friends went to Murcia in Spain to climb the mountains in the Sierra Espuña. This year we went to Snowdonia. After the first day of putting some miles and climbs into our legs we set off on the second day to do The Snowdonia Dog.

Coming down from the climb on the B4407 you can't miss the Stwlan Dam over to the right



For roads less cycled,
Wales has a lot to offer

in the mountains. Considering that the road is just up to the dam and back down the same route, it would normally be the sort of thing that I would not do. But looking at that dam you cannot help but want to climb up to it. We were able to walk across the top of the dam to take some photos of the road. It was stunning.

Back at the hotel, putting our routes onto Strava I was amazed to see that only 363 Strava riders have climbed this road (thankfully I'm not last). It is an absolute hidden gem, a must for anybody who wants a true challenge with an amazing reward at the end. Try it and see.

Adrian, email

Bikes over booze

I recently rediscovered cycling. I have always been a fan and used to cycle a lot, however, I drifted away from the sport to follow a career in weekend and evening social drinking.

Having reached a low point realising that alcohol had got the better of me, I searched for some help. I realised that cycling was now something I could revisit and use for general health and fitness.

I bought a copy of your magazine and read a report on two guys who had given cycling a try after losing their driving licences. They ended up not only ditching the car but the drink and smoking too. It was at this point I realised how powerful the cycling community actually is.

So I thank your publication for printing this material. I am suffering from alcoholism and will battle that for the rest of my life. What I now have is a complete satisfaction for something else that has truly helped me to start to recover.

I wanted to let you know that you have really helped me to get things back on track in my life. It is a steep climb but I will get there and continue to buy your magazines.

Sean, email

CYCLING ISSUE 76

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NEW BIKE TESTED

WHY THIS BIKE?

Traditional British design with Italian flair

BEST FOR

All-seasons riding on all roads

TESTED THIS MONTH

Smashing out the work commute and turning heads in the city



Mason Resolution Hydro Ultegra £3,195

A do-it-all bike with a touch of class

Rob Hoyles

Arguments regarding modern bicycles generally come down to one of three things: weight, aerodynamics or price. Quite often, it's all three. Values such as build quality, ride feel and handling tend to be secondary considerations. This is strange, really, particularly in a pursuit where most of us have neither the ability nor the training time to make the most of any of the marginal gains manufacturers offer in their quest for a share of our spend.

But bikes do exist that reward in ways other than outright speed. Former designer and brand manager for Kinesis Bikes Dominic Mason's new range sets out to prove that, abjuring carbon-fibre opting instead for traditional materials where feel is as important as form or function. *Cycling Active* was among the

first to get a ride on the steel Resolution model, with a fresh batch of the aluminum Definitions still to land. Hopefully we'll be bringing you a test on a Definition very soon.

Frameset

All Mason frames are designed in the UK and manufactured in the industrious northern region of Italy, close to Venice. While being Europe-made goes a long way to justifying the not insignificant price-tag, it also explains the high quality of the finish and the superb attention to detail. Mason spent a long time finding a factory that would adhere strictly to his designs, having been frustrated by compromises during past projects. It was worth it; the tubes are perfectly formed from the finest Columbus steel, and the neatness of the welding is first-class.

Practicalities haven't been left out in the name of style, either. Billed as a '4Season' bike, the Resolution gets discreetly located mudguard and rack eyelets along with ample tyre clearance to run 28mm tyres with the guards or 32s without. The Aperture fork is full carbon, again bespoke to Mason. Unimpressed with what was available off the shelf, a manufacturer was located and promptly furnished with a set of drawings.

Specification

Frameset: Resolution Columbus Spirit/Life performance steel

Gears Shimano Ultegra 6800 11-speed

Chainset Shimano Ultegra 6800

Brakes Shimano STRS685 hydraulic with IceTech 140mm rotors

Wheels Mason x Hunt 4Season disc wheels

Tyres Continental Grand Sport Extra

700x28mm

Bars Deda RHM02

Stem Deda Zero2

Saddle Fabric Scoop

Seatpost Mason Penta carbon, 27.2mm microadjust

Weight 9.45kg/20.8lbs (54cm without pedals)

Size range 50/52/54/56/58/60cm

Size tested 54cm

Contact:

www.masoncycles.cc

Components

Dedacciai tubes are used for Mason's aluminium Definition, so it follows that Deda finishing kit is present throughout the range. There's nothing too flash about the stem and bars but the subtlety suits the bike, as does the riding position, with only a slight stretch to the shallow drops. The headset is also Deda and runs as smoothly as you'd expect.

The only exception to Deda's finishing kit dominance is Mason's own carbon seatpost. Formed from unidirectional carbon-fibre, the slender Penta post features a neat dial to make levelling the saddle easier. Ride comfort and adjustability is on a par with anything I've ridden — it's available as an accessory for just £75.

What can I say about Shimano's 11-speed Ultegra groupset that hasn't been said before? It's light, it's not overly expensive, it works flawlessly and it's one of the best things to happen to mainstream cycling in a while. For me, though, the hydraulic disc brakes are a bone of contention. Sure, for a bike designed to work consistently well, all year round, they make sense — indeed, stopping power and feel were never an issue, whatever the weather. My gripe comes from having to fiddle around centring the calipers to stop dragging and squeaking. Cleaning and de-glazing contaminated pads caused by the manky metropolitan roads to stop



A semi-aero rim helps the 28mm tyres hold speed

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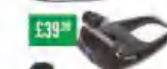
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them howling at low speeds soon became a pain, too. On such a quiet-running bike, the brakes let the side down.

Wheels

You may have gathered by now that Mason is something of a stickler. Unable to find a wheelset that he liked, he teamed up with fellow Sussex-based company Hunt Bike Wheels to produce the Mason x Hunt 4Season Disc wheelset. These feature a 27mm profile to strike a balance between weight and aerodynamics. The all-up claimed weight is just 1,585g — that's good going for a stock disc-specific wheelset and only 65g heavier than Mavic's benchmark £1,350 Ksyrium Pro Carbon SL C Disc wheelset.

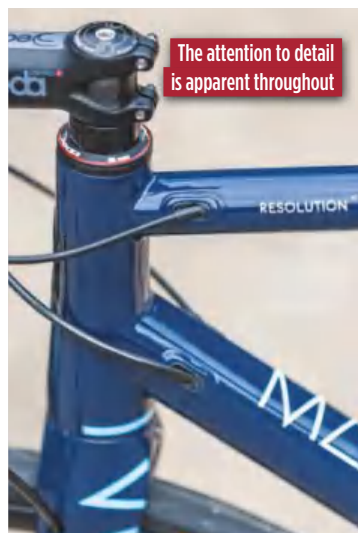
Riding

Mason's mix of materials and design ideologies makes as much sense on the road as it does on paper. Steel for the feel; carbon to save weight and further enhance comfort; and aluminium to keep both weight and costs down. The design is equally interesting with a low bottom bracket to compensate for the larger tyres and improve the handling along with a head tube that offers a real halfway house riding position. Mason states that he's "hit the sweet spot" when it comes to handling, and it's hard to argue.

Hammering this bike through fast, sweeping bends, the mix of agility and stability simply inspires confidence. Ride quality is superb and on all but the hilliest of routes, the bike is an absolute joy to ride. If you can ignore average speeds (and the intermittently noisy brakes) and take pleasure in what is an excellent frame that laughs at road buzz and simply oozes quality, then you won't be disappointed.

Conclusion

This bike isn't for everyone. You won't crack out your fastest 100-mile sportive time on it. It's unlikely you'll trump too many similarly-priced bikes with spec-sheet superiority, either. The best way to describe this bike is, perhaps unkindly, as the most well-sorted winter bike we've ever tested. It's a bike for the connoisseur, a rider who appreciates the



steel appeal but still wants the benefits of a little modern tech. Mason prefers the term 'multi-discipline' to 'do-it-all' and suggests that a Resolution could, "replace three or four of your fleet". As a way to free-up space in the garage, it's a very tempting option. **End**

VERDICT

The Resolution is a bike for life. Beautifully engineered, and ready for anything.

Spot on...

- Build quality
- Ride feel
- Handling

Could do better

- Noisy brakes

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	15/20
BUILD QUALITY	19/20
ROAD HANDLING	19/20
RIDE COMFORT	19/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	15/20
OVERALL RATING	87 /100

ALTERNATIVES

Enigma Etape Disc Ti Ultegra Hydraulic £3,599

With a ride not too dissimilar to steel but with a substantial weight saving, titanium provides a third metal option. With an almost identical component choice as the Resolution, along with similar winter-friendly features, rival UK brand Enigma offers an alternative for weight weenies. Titanium is famously expensive and difficult to work with — facts reflected in the Etape's price tag.



Genesis Equilibrium Disc Ltd £1,849

You don't have to spend three grand to get a decent steel bike. OK, the Equilibrium is lower-spec than the Mason and it's not quite so exclusive but, for the price, still an excellent choice. The latest 11-speed 105 groupset is an absolute corker and the frameset is built to last with top quality British Reynolds 725 tubing.



CA EXPLAINER

Mason's Multiport

Unique to Mason, the Multiport system allows for the internal routing of cables, hydraulic hoses and wires — a world first for a steel frameset.

Interchangeable aluminium inserts that slot into the frame are available to suit different systems. The result is a neat way of making sure that if you are upgrading from a mechanical to an electronic groupset, you're not left with a load of ugly blanking plates or plugs. If you're something of a tech-head, then you should find Mason's excellent website (www.masoncycles.cc) absolutely fascinating.





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NEW BIKE TESTED

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Single-speed folder with full-sized wheels

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City-dwelling commuters on flat-ish roads

TESTED THIS MONTH

On the 07:42 to Victoria



Montague Boston folding bike £699.99

Big-wheeled folding bike for small spaces

Paul Norman

Montague Bikes was the brainchild of Harry Montague, a 6ft 2in US architect who wanted a bike better suited to his size than the usual small-wheeled folding bikes. Along with his son he founded the bike company in 1988 in Boston, Massachusetts to design and sell folding bikes with larger wheel sizes. There's a 700C range — the same sized wheels as a normal road bike — and a 26-inch-wheeled range too, based on a design used by US paratroops.

We've tested the single-speed/fixed 700C-wheeled Boston model, but if you ride hills and require a bit more range, there's an eight-speed hub-gear version and derailleur-gear bikes with up to 30 speeds. The SwissBike range

with 26-inch wheels has chunkier tyres and a more off-road feel.

Frameset

The Montague's frame is made of aluminium with a steel fork. There are two parallel top tubes to ensure rigidity. These are slightly bowed, which Montague claims helps to dampen road vibration. The design means that the main frame-tubes do not have a joint in them, so they are lighter and more robust than a hinged design.

There's a quick-release on the top tube and a pivot built into the seat tube. Pull up the quick-release lever and the rear triangle pivots around the seat tube so that the whole bike folds to around half its length. The front wheel also needs to be removed to take advantage of this space saving; there's a nylon strap to fix it to the bike's top tube.

Components

With single-speed gearing, the Montague's components are quite straightforward. There's an SR Suntour alloy chainset with a 42-tooth chainring. This has a chainguard integrated into the design to help keep chain grease off clothing and legs.

The brakes are Promax dual-pivot calipers and there's a Montague-

Specification

Frameset 7005 series

aluminium, cro-mo fork

Gears 16t single-

speed/fixed

Brakes Promax alloy

Chainset SR Suntour

42t

Wheels Alex alloy

32-hole 700C, Formula

alloy hubs with flip-flop

rear

Tyres Kenda Kwik

Roller Sport 700x28c

Handlebar Riser

straight bar, alloy

Stem Kalloy alloy

Saddle Areo

Performance

Seatpost 27.2mm alloy

Size range 19in, 21in

Weight

10.91kg/24.05lb

Size tested 19in

Contact www.

montaguefoldingbike.

co.uk

“The whole bike folds to around half its length, though the front wheel needs to be removed to fully save space”

branded saddle with a cut-out mounted on a 27.2mm alloy seatpost. The bike is supplied with alloy platform pedals, although there's the option to buy folding pedals to save a bit of width. You can also buy quick-release mudguards to add a bit more weather protection.

Wheels

The wheels have Alex alloy rims laced with 36 14-gauge stainless-steel spokes to Formula hubs. The rear wheel is bolted on to allow the chain length to be adjusted for the single-speed setup. The hub is a flip-flop design; the bike can be run either with a freewheel or fixed.

The front wheel uses the same components but runs on a Clix quick-release hub, so that the wheel can be quickly removed for storage. The Clix system uses a spring-loaded collar to make taking the wheel out very fast, as it removes the requirement to unscrew the quick-release lever to get the axle out of the safety tabs on the forks.

Tyres are 28mm Kenda Kwik Roller Sport, which have a wide section and



Clix quick-release system folds the bike in 20 seconds



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Riding

Let's start with carrying. Folding the bike is quick and easy. The front wheel drops out in a flash and the quick-release on the top tube just needs to be flipped to turn the rear triangle forward. It doesn't fold flat against the top tube, though, as the rear wheel gets in the way, so the folded bike is quite wide.

Slot the rear wheel in-between the handlebar and the frame and the whole lot can be held together with the nylon strap around the bars, front wheel and frame. The folded package is easily carried by the top tube — stable and reasonably comfortable, if a bit heavy. Reversing the process gets the bike ready for action very quickly.

Once aboard, the big-wheeled design comes into its own. The Montague feels super-stable, with no evidence of flex in the frame. It's quite heavy, though, so takes a bit of effort to get moving, and once there's more than a gentle gradient, the effort level soon mounts. That said, out of the saddle you can grind up quite steep gradients. The ride is comfortable over rougher surfaces thanks to the wide tyres.

The flat bars are comfortable and give a riding position that is not too upright, and the rubber grips are fine for an hour or so without gloves. The supplied brakes are adequate rather than super-effective; they would probably benefit from a change of pads. I found the Montague's saddle well padded without being too soft — and comfortable enough to ride in non-padded shorts.

Conclusion

Montague takes a fresh approach to folding bikes with a design that isn't super-compact but which has rideability advantages. The larger wheels really do roll much better and give a more familiar ride feel than do smaller wheels.

The downside is a bulky folded package. It's fine for saving space at home or in the car (compared to a full-size bike), but a bit too ungainly to carry around on the Tube. **End**



VERDICT

A great bike for those with limited space who want to ride a full-sized bike

Spot-on...

- 700C wheels roll well
- Novel folding design

Could do better

- Not as easy as some to carry on public transport

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	16/20
BUILD QUALITY	17/20
ROAD HANDLING	17/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL RATING	86 /100

ALTERNATIVES

Brompton M1E £770

Another single-speed folder, but with 16-inch wheels, the M1E folds down into a really compact package for storage and commuting. It's a bit more fiddly to unfold, though, and with its steel frame is quite heavy. The small wheels also make for a less comfortable ride on uneven surfaces and it's a similar weight too.



Tern Joe D24 £550

The Tern is a folder built around 26-inch MTB wheels and fitted with wider tyres with a significant tread. As with the Montague, these provide some comfort and speed on the road and also allow you to handle bumpier terrain. It's got a triple chainset and 24 speeds, so it's good for hillier routes, though it's even heavier to carry around.



CA EXPLAINER

Larger-wheeled options for folders

A classic folder like the Brompton has small wheels so that it makes a really compact package for portability, but there's an increasing trend to design folding bikes around larger wheel sizes. These offer a lot less rolling resistance, increased comfort and speed and an ability to roll over the bumps more easily. Twenty-four and 26-inch options are becoming more common, but the Boston takes this trend to its conclusion by using full-size 700C wheels.



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Scott Speedster 50 £599

Low-cost sportive machine with promising looks

Jack Elton-Waters

This bike's design and paint job belie its low price and make it look like a much higher-spec ride. The slick looks and slight aero profiling to the down tube mean it wouldn't look out of place in a race. However, the ride doesn't quite match the looks.

Frameset

The frame itself is made from double-butted alloy, as you'd expect in this price bracket. The frame is stiff and responsive, but there's a compromise for that low price: it's quite heavy. The

first disappointment to mention in this review is the alloy fork, which gives a harsh ride and passes every bit of road buzz on to the rider. Other brands offer, for a similar price, bikes with a carbon fork; this tweak — and even a minor price increase to facilitate it — would improve this build a great deal.

Components

On the whole, the groupset suits the price, and the gear transmission is smooth and accurate — as is to be expected from Shimano. The mix of Sora and Claris runs well, and the inclusion of a 32t sprocket helps when hauling this bike's 10kg up the climbs. The eight-speed cassette means that the gap between the gears can feel a bit clunky, but does not affect the ride quality too severely. Moving on to the Tektro brakes — the second disappointment to mention — they felt unresponsive and did not instil much confidence on steeper descents. The inclusion of Shimano brakes would noticeably improve the spec.

“Scott has missed the mark in a few key areas, and it's had a serious impact on the ride”

Specification

Frameset Speedster Aero, double butted 6061 alloy
Gears Shimano Sora RD-3500 8-speed with Shimano Claris FD 2403 front mech, Shimano HG50-8 11-30t cassette
Chainset Shimano Claris FC2450, compact 50/34t
Brakes Tektro Comp SCBR 312
Wheels Syncros Race 27 Aero Profile with Formula Comp hubs
Tyres Kenda Kriterium, 700Q23c
Bars Syncros RR2.0, Anatomic 31.8mm
Stem JD ST57 alloy
Saddle Syncros Road Endurance
Seatpost Syncros RR2.5 31.6/300mm
Weight 10kg / 22lb
Size range: 49, 52, 54, 56, 58cm
Size tested: 56cm
www.scott-sports.com

The standard tyres are disappointingly narrow

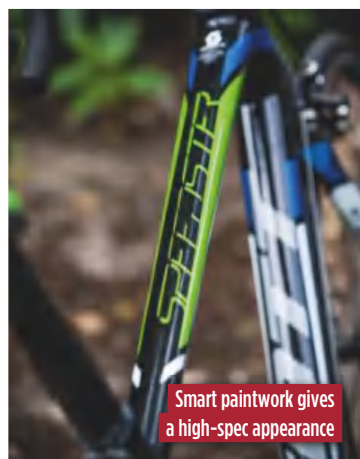


Wheels

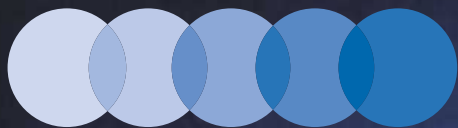
The Speedster's wheelset felt spot-on for the price and in relation to the rest of the build. Stiff and strong, and able to bounce off some questionable road surfaces, these low-cost wheels do what's expected of them. They have an aero profiling, which is a good touch for entry-level hoops, and they work well with the aesthetic of the bike.

Riding

With some very minor tweaks, the Speedster could be a formidable entry-level sportive machine. Unfortunately, the manufacturer has missed the mark in a few places, which has had a serious impact on the ride as a whole. As mentioned, the alloy fork sends all the road buzz into the rider's wrists, something that could be dampened with a carbon fork. This could also be alleviated with 25mm tyres, which are now the common



Smart paintwork gives a high-spec appearance



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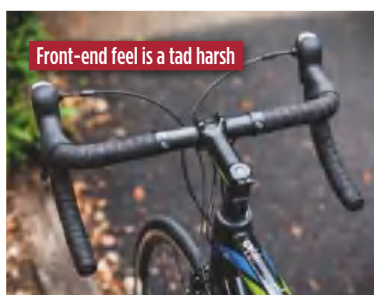
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option on most road bikes. The rest of the bike actually rode very well. The frame is stiff and the power transfer is efficient, as you would expect from Shimano.

Conclusion

This is a good-looking bike competing in a competitive beginner market. On first sight and first sit, you might think you've landed a bargain. However, with a bit of market research to see what other manufacturers supply for a similar amount of money, and a couple of miles on some rough road surfaces, it becomes clear that the Speedster doesn't quite hit the mark. And that's a shame because it has some good qualities; almost, yet not quite. **End**



VERDICT

So close, yet so far. Some minor tweaks would make this bike so much better.

Spot-on...

- Solid alloy frame will last a lifetime
- Smooth gear transmission

Could do better

- Carbon fork and Shimano brakes would set this above its peers

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	15/20
BUILD QUALITY	17/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	15/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	16/20
OVERALL RATING	81 /100

ALTERNATIVES

Cannondale Synapse Alloy Claris

£599.99

The same price as the Scott but with a carbon-bladed fork; the drivetrain, though, is entirely Claris — no Sora here. This bike also comes with 25mm tyres, now de rigueur on most road bikes for added comfort and puncture resistance.

www.evanscycles.com



Trek 1.2 £650

For £50 more than the Scott, the Trek comes with carbon forks and a full Sora gearset. Again coming with 25mm tyres, this bike is an example of what the Scott could be with some minor tweaks.

www.trekbikes.com



CA EXPLAINER

Wider tyres

Previously, thinner meant faster. Nowadays, manufacturers are almost unanimous in their support of wider tyres, claiming lower rolling resistance, increased comfort and reduced risk of puncturing. The Scott Speedster arrived with a pair of 23mm tyres — an increasingly rare sight on new bikes. A bike that is aimed at beginners and sportive riders would certainly benefit from the increased comfort of wider rubber and should be the first upgrade any buyer should make.



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7 OF THE BEST

Bibshorts

If there's one piece of clothing no cyclist should be without, it's a good pair of shorts. **Chris Hovenden** puts seven of the best bibs to the test with an eye on comfort and performance

It is amazing how often we all spend exorbitant amounts of money on cycling kit, but often neglect to buy good quality bibshorts.

As the main contact point with your bike, when riding for anything more than 20 minutes having a

comfortable pair of shorts is imperative.

Comfort does not just mean how big the chamois insert is; it also involves a variety of factors including how breathable the material of the shorts is, how supportive the Lycra is, and

crucially that the seams do not cause any irritation.

You could spend as much as £200 on bibshorts, but in reality you can get some top-quality pairs for around £100. I have ridden seven mid-range shorts to help you decide what could be the right bib for you.

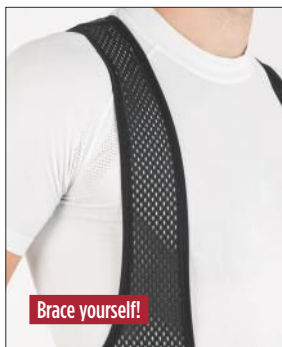
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Grippers

One of the main grippers with bibshorts is that the legs ride up. Grippers run along the cuff of the legs of the bibshorts to (supposedly) hold them in place.

Until recently grippers were often silicone tape or dots. However, now in the age of compression clothing, it is not unusual for bibshorts to use wide highly elasticated hems. On the one hand this reduces irritation but can mean over time they become less effective.

Chamois insert

A quality insert is right up there in the list of priorities. In theory, the more you spend on a pair of bibshorts the better the quality of the insert. From a padding perspective the most

important part is the rear by your sit bones.

More expensive shorts will have an insert that is contoured with different levels of padding in selected areas of the pad. Historically it was a one-size-fits-all, but some companies are now offering various pad width options.

Braces

There are two straps that run over your shoulders to hold up the shorts. In the past the braces were often an afterthought, made out of the same material as the shorts. Now, more expensive bibshorts have braces that are not only stretchy and tight, but also light and well ventilated. You will see several different designs and styles; most are made out of netted material while others are made out of solid stretchy fabric.

Pearl Izumi Pro In-R-Cool bibshorts **£119.99**

These bibshorts are from Pearl Izumi's top pro line and come with a pad that is actually quite thin, particularly around the edges. Nevertheless it's comfortable enough and seems to be padded in the right places. The whole of the red parts of the legs act as a gripper, so they're very wide, non-constrictive and keep the legs from riding up. Pearl's In-R-Cool treatment reflects some wavelengths of light and should keep them just that bit cooler than the usual black Lycra. The bibs are light and most seams are flat-locked.

A great option for those who prefer a thinner pad



www.madison.co.uk

Endura FS260 Pro SL **£99.99**

To ensure you get the best fit for you, the FS260 bibshorts are available in three different pad widths per size. I wore the medium-sized pad, which was comfortable with its subtle but well-positioned contours. The grippers and large, stretchy but firm cuffs kept the legs of the bibshorts securely in place. The leg is a good length although longer leg options are available. Finally, the combination of breathable braces and multiple leg panels make these good quality bibshorts.

Pro quality, different width pads, two leg lengths and superb comfort

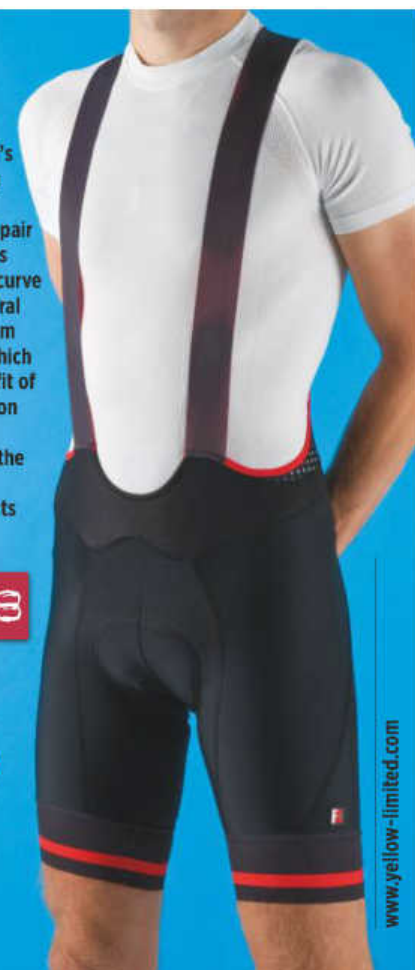


www.endura.co.uk

Giordana FR-C Red **£119.99**

With its distinctive banker's braces Giordana's offering definitely looks a little different to your standard pair of bibshorts. Giordana says they are constructed on a curve to match your body's natural riding posture. I can confirm the grippers were tight, which mirrored the overall snug fit of the HC-44 high compression fabric. In addition to the braces, the netted feel on the back of the bib felt airy. The finish of these bibshorts (including the pad) is unquestionably good — it is just a question of whether you like a tight, compressed fit.

A compressed fit, which may not suit all, but great quality nonetheless



www.yellow-limited.com

Vermarc SP.L LD **£89.99**

Italian brand Vermarc supplies clothing to both the Lotto-Soudal and Etixx-Quick Step pro teams. The Vermarc shorts look sharp with flat-lock stitching, atypical coloured leg cuffs, different material used for the legs and central section and the reflector strips on the rear of the leg. The shorts felt comfortable and the legs did not ride up, so the silicone grippers do the job. The long-distance specific chamois felt good, if not noticeably more comfortable than some of the thicker pads also on test. For the price these are solid and nice looking bibshorts.

A solid choice, that is well made and comfortable



www.chickencycles.co.uk

Castelli Volo bibshorts **£90**

Flat-lock stitching, superb quality 'Affinity' Lycra, mesh grippers on the legs and Castelli's Kiss Air pad, all add up to create a pair of bibs that are supremely comfortable, especially on long hot rides. After several washes the mesh grippers on the legs have become a little looser, but these bibshorts remain an excellent lightweight and highly comfortable option. There are also some subtle reflective hi-vis details built in too. But, if the luminescent, Tron styling isn't your cup of tea, there are several other options to choose from.

9

Good colour options and excellent all-day comfort



www.saddleback.co.uk

Etxeondo Team Edition bibshorts **£105**

These bibshorts are the same design as used by John Degenkolb's Giant-Alpecin team, just minus the logos. The Urraki seatpad is comfortable on extended rides. The shorts are quite compressive, although the bibs are long and wide, while the rear yoke keeps them in place well. The shorts are made of two different fabrics. The central section is matt, softer and more hard-wearing while the material of the upper back and legs is shiny, thinner and more elastic. The leg grippers too are wide and comfortable.

8

Professional quality, good fit, with hard-wearing fabrics



www.etxeondo.com

Lusso Peloton Pro bibshorts **£94.99**

Made in Manchester the Lusso bibshorts look to be good quality with flat and overlapped seams, 45mm SC-10 leg grippers, reflective CoolTech Plus Lycra and Cool Mesh fabric. Lusso claim these are professional level bibshorts, which explains the rear race radio pocket. The chamois is thick but, although a personal preference, did feel a little too wide for me. The leg grippers were fine but could have held the leg more securely. Overall the Lusso bibshorts are comfortable and good quality, you could do a lot worse.

7

Comfortable, well-made shorts with a wide chamois



www.lusso.bike

VERDICT

This was a closely fought group test, but there had to be a winner. The Endura FS260- Pro SL came out on top for a variety of reasons, including the secure and irritation-free grippers along with the option to choose one of three pad widths and, finally, its competitive price. The only negative for the Endura bibshorts, which can be easily solved, is the label half way up the back, which itched a little.

Notable mentions for both the Castelli Volo and the Giordana FR-C Red, which fitted well and felt comfortable even after a fair amount of time spent in the saddle.

In summary, for the price and ability to ensure the best fit, the Endura shorts would be my choice.





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Team sports bikes

Road machines with a pro squad influence

Words Matt Lamy

The phrase 'replica bikes' can tend to summon up a couple of distinct and not always complementary notions. Either, these might be purely marketing-influenced imitations of the real thing; or they could be machines with such a racing influence they are no use for the typical amateur road rider. The reality is that team-themed bikes are actually likely to be decent models from a manufacturer's normal range, only with some slight tweaks to make them more interesting.

Is this the bike for me?

The biggest hurdles to overcome when considering these kinds of bikes are the visual aesthetics of team branding. If you're already a FDJ, BMC or Movistar fan, then that's all good. If you're not fussed either way, but like the idea of more dynamic paintjobs, these might tickle your fancy, too.

Focusing on the finish might seem shallow, but it's because you can find team decals on bikes at almost any price and featuring almost any kind of frame. Indeed, in this test alone we have models from £800 to almost £6,500, with their respective qualities ranging from a superb aluminium sportive bike right up to a cutting-edge carbon race machine.

Bikes on test

We start off with a very pretty little machine from French firm Lapierre, sponsor of the FDJ squad. Dripping in squad branding, the Audacio 300 also comes with a solid spec: quality aluminium frame, Shimano Sora gearset and even Shimano wheels for just £799.99.

Next we have one of BMC's excellent Teammachines. This SLR03 is the entry-level carbon frame but at £1,500 it represents good value with a full Shimano 105 groupset and dependable Shimano hoops.

Finally we have the ultimate option: a proper Canyon Ultimate CF SLX 9.0 Team almost the same as that ridden by the Movistar boys. It's got a top-end carbon frame, Campagnolo Super Record EPS electronic gears and even some ultra-sexy Campag Bora Ultra wheels. The price? Don't ask...



Lapierre Audacio 300 FDJ £799.99

Head tube

The endurance or sportive-specific bike will have a taller head tube than a race bike for a more upright position that's easier on the back. Its wheelbase will also be longer for more stability, its top tube shorter and its head and seat tube angles on average a degree slacker.



Frame

You can find any kind of frame with team branding on it but manufacturers will tend to try to relate them to specific sporting functions. So great all-day comfort sportive machines will be related to the bikes a team uses for cobbles; general use road bikes will be related to their stage race mounts; and aero frames will be related to their special road race weapons.

BMC Teammachine SLR03 105 £1,500

Wheels

One notable aspect of team-influenced bikes is that you might find manufacturers fitting slightly better wheels than normal. All the bikes on test here come with Shimano or Campagnolo hoops — they're not always race-ready, but they are decent quality and they look the part.

Canyon Ultimate CF SLX 9.0 Team Mov £6,440

Gearsets

If a manufacturer is really trying to emulate its team bikes it will also fit gearsets from the team's component sponsor. In truth, we've got everything ranging from Shimano Sora to Campagnolo Super Record EPS here, so it's still a pretty wide spectrum of quality.

TEAM-THEMED SPORTS BIKES What to expect

- Components made by the squad's official sponsors
- A focus on light weight
- Quite often name-brand wheels
- Funky decals and colours

Lapierre Audacio 300 FDJ £799.99

A top-quality aluminium road machine with some pro squad styling

Back in the 1970s and 1980s French riders such as Bernard Hinault and Laurent Fignon, French teams such as Renault-Elf and Mercier, and French bikes such as Peugeot and Gitane, ruled the pro racing roost. This Team FDJ-inspired Lapierre marks a small return to those glory days.

Frameset

So with a French maker, a French team livery, and a tricolore paint scheme, this is a perfect French racer, n'est-ce pas? Well, it's very French, but one look at the frame will reveal it's not particularly racy. The aluminium frame won't be ridden in a Tour stage anytime soon, and the overall weight of 9.8kg is heavy for a bike in the top half of the sub-£1,000 bracket.

Those, though, are the only negatives. The frame itself is nicely put together from 7005 aluminium. It's designed with a slight curve to the top tube and a sensible length head tube, suggesting a hint of comfort without being silly about things. Seatstays look relatively thin, chainstays look strong for power transfer, and a carbon fork up front should keep things comfortably on track.

Components

The Shimano Sora groupset is another non-racy element to this package. However, when it's set up well there's a reassuring solidity about Sora and having a triple chainset really helps with gearing options when the hills loom

large — especially as this only comes with a largest sprocket at the back of 25t. In truth, I really like Sora and while it doesn't have the refinement of, say, 11-speed 105, it never seems to let the rider down.

The same can't be said for the Promax dual-pivot brakes, though, which feel wooden, down on power, and would certainly benefit from a block swap. Much better is the range of finishing kit, where we find good quality Ritchey products and a Selle Italia X1 saddle — a marked improvement on the own-brand or non-brand kit often found on sub-£1,000 bikes.

Wheels

Keeping up the Gallic influence, it's nice to see some very proficient 25c Michelin tyres fitted to the Audacio 300. These offer a very fair blend of comfort and performance, Michelin sometimes feeling like



Sora groupset is a great value performer

ALTERNATIVE

Merida Ride 400

Merida's Ride 400 might feature a Team Lampre colour scheme and branding, but it's a very comfortable long-ride aluminium machine. The aggressive frame features a very small rear triangle, internal cable routing, Shimano 105 gears, a Fulcrum Racing Sport wheelset and a carbon stem and seatpost.





Specification

Frameset

7005 aluminium,
carbon fork

Gears Shimano Sora,
9-speed, 11-25t

Chainset Shimano
Sora triple, 50/39/30t

Brakes Promax RC 841
dual-pivot calipers

Wheels

Shimano R501

Tyres Michelin
Dynamic Sport 25c

Bar/stem Ritchey
Comp Curve

aluminium / Ritchey 4
Axis aluminium

Seatpost Ritchey 2
Bolts aluminium

Saddle Selle Italia X1

Size range 46, 49, 52,
55, 58, 61cm

Size tested 58cm

Weight 9.8kg / 21.6lb

Contact [www.
hotlines-uk.com](http://www.hotlines-uk.com)

Tricolore alu frame flies
the flag for France

a relatively unsung hero in the world of quality road tyres. The Shimano R501 wheelset is also quietly impressive. They might not be jaw-droppingly light or plush, but in use these hoops were strong, smooth, and — rather like the Sora gearset — provided an overriding sense of reliability.

Riding

Indeed, the overall sense that this is a bike that 'works' comes through most clearly on the road. When dealing with imperfect road conditions, the Audacio performs very much as you'd expect from a good aluminium frame. Big bumps of course have an effect and it can struggle a little on rippled tarmac, but it's a very forgiving alloy frame with fine long-ride comfort.

Because of the well-designed rear triangle, the Audacio boasts very efficient power transfer. The comfort-oriented design elements might prevent it behaving like a super-reactive, throw-it-into-corners livewire machine. But the handling is surefooted and, as a big-distance cruiser, you feel as if every leg spin is having maximum effect.

In fact, for sportives, it's one of the most satisfying aluminium bikes around.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	17/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	19/20
RIDE COMFORT	19/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL RATING	91/100

BMC Teammachine SLR03 105 £1,500

Looks like a team bike, rides like a sportive dream

Swiss engineering combined with a Tour de France-winning team should mean an uncompromising bike built for speed. With a name like 'Teammachine', it boasts a fairly unambiguous moniker, too — this particular version even copies the same colour scheme of the BMC pro team bikes. But, despite all that, the Teammachine has a surprisingly agreeable temperament.

Frameset

The SLR03 might be trumped in the Teammachine family hierarchy by the ultra-lightweight SLR01 and the mid-range SLR02, but it still features a carbon frame and it shares the same geometry as the bikes used by the BMC pro team. It does have a slightly heavier construction, but the notion of functional Swiss engineering, rather than vogueish details remains. So there's no hidden direct-mount rear brake, cabling is all visible, and even though the tubes are of varying profiles and widths, they never become simple squares. Despite its obvious functionality, aggressive stance — with tiny rear triangle and top tube that tapers as it heads rearwards — and relatively reserved finish, it's really a very pretty bike. Finally, the total weight of 8.7kg is pretty much on the money for a £1,500 road bike.

Components

We tested the old Teammachine when it had 10-speed 105 on it and, as good as that version of 105 was, it still felt like it

really held the frame back. The new 105 puts those qualms to bed and you'd have to say that this frame and groupset combo has to be in the running for the best mid-range sports bike package available. The latest 11-speed 105 set-up is a pure joy to use — gear shifts are almost imperceptible. Cost-cutting omissions from the full 105 groupset include the brakes and the compact chainset, the latter combining with an 11-28t cassette to give ideal everyday gearing. The BMC finishing kit does the job and looks the part. In short, it's kitted out very smartly.

Wheels

Shimano RS10s sometimes get a bad rap, mainly because they're a little heavy, yet they often come fitted on bikes with sporting aspirations — such as this Teammachine. However, they're also strong and functional. So, if you're not a racer, you'll probably appreciate their reliable smoothness and decent



ALTERNATIVE

Giant TCR Advanced 1 £1,499

The Giant TCR has a long and distinguished history among the pro ranks, having first been introduced to the world in 1997 underneath the riders of the ONCE pro team. Now it's part of Team Giant-Alpecin's arsenal and although this model isn't a true team replica, it does reflect that squad's colours. Like the Teammachine, it comes with an established and respected carbon frame, while the component list includes a Shimano Ultegra groupset and Giant's normally excellent own-brand wheels. www.giant-bicycles.com/en-gb/





Specification

Frameset

Teammachine SLR03
carbon, carbon fork

Gears Shimano 105
11-speed, 11-28t

Chainset Shimano
RS500 compact,
50/34t

Brakes Shimano
BR-R561

Wheels Shimano RS10
Tyres Continental GP 4
Season 28c

Bar/stem BMC RDB 3
aluminium / BMC
RST3 aluminium

Seatpost BMC RSP 3

Saddle Selle Royal
Sirio

Size range 47, 51, 54,
57, 60cm

Size tested 57cm

Weight 8.7kg/19.1lb

Contact www.evanscycles.com

Budget brakes
are adequate



all-round performance. If you intend to compete on the Teammachine — and even this SLR03 version is certainly good enough to go racing on — then an upgrade to lighter hoops is on the cards. You've still got a cracking pair of training wheels, though. Meanwhile, the Continental GP 4 Season tyres are very secure performers and, in this 28c version, offer a soupçon of extra comfort.

Riding

That extra comfort serves as the cherry on the compliancy cake. For a bike designed to be ridden at speed, it is the equivalent of a feather bed. Sportive and leisure road riders, ignore that Teammachine title because it's easily forgiving enough for full days in the saddle. Minor road imperfections are glided over, and even bigger hits pass without fanfare.

In terms of performance, acceleration is brisk and on climbs the Teammachine gives back everything you put in without any power feeling wasted.

When coming down the other side of a hill it gets even better — you might as well be airborne as you smoothly swoop down twisting descents. It's efficient, it's comfy, and it's a whole lot of fun.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	18/20
BUILD QUALITY	19/20
ROAD HANDLING	19/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	19/20
OVERALL RATING	93 /100

Canyon Ultimate CF SLX 9.0 Team Mov £6,440

Essentially the Movistar team race bike

Enough mucking about with replicas and facsimiles, let's get our hands on the real thing. This Canyon Ultimate CF SLX 9.0 Team Mov is the commercially available version of the bike the Movistar team actually uses and, as far as we can tell, it's only a power crank short of being exactly the same as the squad bikes. Dreams of being Alex Dowsett will cost you though – to the tune of £6,440.

Frameset

For all the marketing talk about technical innovations such as 'aero' chainstay-mounted rear brakes, it's telling that all Canyon's team bikes come with traditional seatstay-mounted rear calipers. Indeed, take away all the exotic componentry and the Ultimate is a very traditional-looking carbon road bike with an unthreatening stack height and a very moderate compact frame shape.

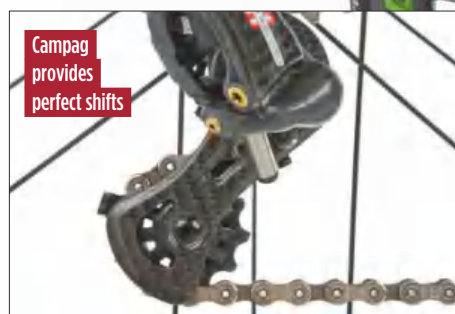
The frame's true class can be found in the detail. Canyon's fork design is beautifully integrated with the frame's front end, and the pencil-thin seatstays, which originate from the top tube and pass either side of the seat tube, look sublime. If the Movistar colourway is too loud for your liking, it's also available in 'Stealth' grey. And the 6.55kg weight for an XL bike is frankly astounding.

Components

Campagnolo Super Record with all its carbon ingredients is arguably the sexiest groupset available, but it's not quite perfect. I found the

feedback of the brake pads on the carbon rims a bit muted, although the electronic gearing system is still impressive with quick, direct and perfect gearshifts. The tactility of everything is fantastic, too.

On a bike at this price everything should be perfect, but I'm not super keen on the little box that has to be rubber-banded onto the stem. It just looks a bit unfinished, while bar and stem space is a prized commodity these days for GPS, phone holder, etc. Actually, the component that impressed the most was also the most simple: Canyon's Ergospeed Gel bar tape in Movistar colours truly is plush, luxurious stuff.



ALTERNATIVE

Trek Custom Emonda SLR TrekFactory Racing Team Edition £9,543.99

Performance-driven road bikes with a nod to long-ride comfort don't come much better than this Trek Factory Racing Team Emonda. It's fitted with Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 electronic gears and Bontrager Aeolus3 carbon wheels. But if you thought the Canyon's price was high, make sure you're sitting down: this costs nearly a cool £10k. www.trekbikes.com





Specification

Frameset: Canyon Ultimate CF SLX carbon, Canyon One One Four SLX carbon fork
Gears: Campagnolo Super Record EPS 11-speed, 11-27t
Chainset: Campagnolo Super Record Ultra-Torque semi-compact 52/36t
Brakes: Campagnolo Super Record Skeleton
Wheels: Campagnolo Bora Ultra
Tyres: Continental Grand Prix 4000S II 23c
Bar/stem: Canyon H18 Ergo CF carbon / Canyon V13 carbon
Seatpost: Canyon S13 VCLS CF carbon
Saddle: Fizik Antares K3
Size range: XS, S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL
Size tested: XL
Weight: 6.55kg/14.4lb
Contact: www.canyon.com



Ergospeed bar tape is a classy trimming

Wheels

The Campagnolo Bora Ultra wheels are so smooth and eager to get rolling, you may think there's a motor hidden in their carbon hubs. However, they're not without their faults and those deep 50mm carbon profiles react to any sidewind — quite how featherlight pro riders stay aboard these things is a mystery.

The Conti GP 4000S tyres grip the road very well and handle corners at a sometimes ridiculous pace. At 23c, though, they are fitted for speed, not comfort.

Riding

Actually, comfort is not a problem because, considering the Ultimate CF SLX is essentially a race machine, it provides quite impressive levels of compliancy. It's very good at soaking up imperfect road surfaces and general rumbles, but bigger hits do reveal the sheer rigidity of the bike. Helping matters, though, is a very sensible riding position, which is suitably aggressive but not constrictive.

Get your head down, and the Canyon is one of the most effortless, high-speed bikes around. With that price and spec so it should be, but it really does feel like the pedal-powered equivalent of an F1 car. Climbs tend to disappear behind you, and every flat road is an opportunity to see what you can do. In fact, I predict every Ultimate CF SLX rider will develop one thing — a new intimate relationship with their brake levers.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	20/20
BUILD QUALITY	20/20
ROAD HANDLING	20/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	15/20
OVERALL RATING	93/100



BMC's all-round flair shines through

Three bikes, from three different areas of the market, with three different ride goals in mind, yet, not only are they connected by their mutual pro squad influences, they also represent some of the very best bikes at their respective price points.

Let's start with the Audacio 300, which, despite its overt pro team flavouring, is actually one of the best sub-£1,000 sportive bikes we've ridden in a while. Brakes and weight are slight negatives, but generally the Audacio is a welcome reminder that a good aluminium frame with quality kit doesn't have to be seen as an inferior choice. For all the visual theatrics, it's a real rider's bike. Anyone looking for a comfortable, reliable and sensibly fast alloy road bike might want to start supporting FDJ.

Making a bid for entry-level carbon bike honours is the BMC Teammachine SLR03. It would be interesting to test this model against its SLR02 and SLR01 siblings because, in isolation, it feels every inch a top-quality composite road frame. Add to that the ability to use it as a comfy and quick sportive machine, or even as a handy little race bike, and you've got a master of all trades.

Finally we come to the big-hitter. The Canyon Ultimate CF SLX Team Mov is undoubtedly the best bike here, with a stunning spec, a fantastic frame and a weight that almost defies belief. The best bit is, you don't have to be familiar with the hardships of a pro racer's life to enjoy it. But that price rather overshadows everything else. No matter how you slice it, it's simply not an option for most road riders.

**LAPIERRE AUDACIO
300 FDJ £799.99**

91_{/100}

Spot on...

- Fantastic long-ride performance
- Reliable choice of components

Near miss

- Very poor Promax brakes
- At almost 10kg it's heavy

**BMC TEAMMACHINE
SLR03 105 £1,500**

93_{/100}

Spot on...

- Excellent all-round ability
- 11-speed Shimano 105 works beautifully
- Fine carbon frame

Near miss

- Budget Shimano brakes
- Lighter wheels would make it race-worthy

**CANYON ULTIMATE CF
SLX 9.0 £6,440**

93_{/100}

Spot on...

- Sexy Campagnolo components
- Fantastic top-end carbon frame
- Stunning 6.55kg complete weight

Near miss

- Brakes lack feel on carbon rims
- High price

ALTERNATIVES

Ridley Fenix Team £TBC

The new Fenix SL carbon frame was launched earlier this year and is the general-purpose race bike of the Lotto-Soudal squad. It's designed to offer a heady mix of strength, aerodynamic efficiency, and comfort. This model comes with a fine Campagnolo Chorus mechanical groupset. It's so new we don't have a price for it yet. www.ridley-bikes.com



Scott Foil Team Issue £4,999

The Scott Foil is the aero race machine for both the Orica-GreenEdge and IAM Cycling pro squads. Your £5k nets a fantastic carbon frameset with race-oriented geometry and a full mechanical Shimano Dura-Ace groupset. Expect a sub-7kg total weight, too. www.scott-sports.com/gb/



Specialized S-Works Venge Dura-Ace Di2 £8,000

Mark Cavendish's weapon of choice, the Venge has been around for a little while but is still one of the most exciting team bikes among WorldTour squads. This top-of-the-range model includes Dura-Ace Di2 electronic gears and ultra-light Roval Rapide carbon wheels. www.specialized.com



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7 OF THE BEST

Performance road shoes

Offering enhanced sole stiffness for maximal power transfer, performance road shoes are an asset for any serious road cyclist. Here are seven of the best in the £80-120 price range

Words Chris Catchpole

As any cyclist knows, the key contact areas between a rider and their pride and joy are hands, bum, and feet. Focusing on performance and comfort in these areas will greatly improve your cycling experience, because it's these contact points that can leave a lasting impression — for better or worse.

For this reason, we at *Cycling Active* always recommend buying the best you can afford when upgrading in these areas. The old adage 'buy cheap, buy twice' is never more true than when it

comes to the big three — and shoes are the most important of these.

Always in touch

The only contact point by which you are permanently connected to your bike is the pedals, via your shoes and clipless cleats. Thus, we're taking a close look at a range of performance road shoes, each of which is designed to enhance pedalling efficiency while leaving your feet feeling comfortable. Indeed, investing in a new pair of

shoes will sharpen up your cycling outfit, so it's a win-win situation all round.

Performance road shoes like those featured here not only improve your performance by offering stiff and responsive soles, good ventilation and comfort; they also look the part while doing it.

We've tested seven pairs of road shoes over the last few months, all of them at the competitive price point of £80-130, to see which of them stands out.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Sole

Most road cycling shoes only accept road-style cleats, such as Shimano's SPD-SL or Look Keo systems — a problem if you prefer to use mtb-style SPD pedals. If that applies to you, an SPD shoe designed for off-road or commuting duties is the solution. A stiff sole will give you positive power transfer as a reward for your efforts. If stiffness is important to you, we recommend getting hands-on in your local bike shop and giving the shoes a good bend to see how flexible they are, or aren't.

Ventilation

You'll want lots of ventilation for hot summer days, but as the inevitable happens and



temperatures drop, a shoe that lets in too much cooling air isn't ideal. To maintain good temperature balance, most road cycling shoes come with a standard amount of ventilation, usually around the tops and sides. If you do most of your riding in summer, look out for a shoe with above-average ventilation.

Fastening

As shoe prices rise, Velcro straps are replaced with more expensive and complex plastic ratchet systems. If you're lucky, a fancy Boa-style dial adjusts the tension of a cable, acting as a lace. Each type has its own merits and drawbacks, with price implications too.



Specialized Elite Road £100

Black on top, bright green underneath; you won't go unnoticed in these road shoes from Specialized. They incorporate Body Geometry features in the sole, which can be fine-tuned with footbeds and wedges. The loud sole and reflective elements on the heel would make these sensible fast commuting shoes but they're stiff enough for sportives and racing too. The padding in

the tongue and around the ankle and heel is perhaps too generous. The toe box is spacious, and the Velcro and ratchet closure is plenty tight enough. The ratchet feels a bit flimsy but overall the Elite Roads are fine all-round road shoes.

Comfortable and versatile all-rounder



www.specializedconceptstore.co.uk



Pearl Izumi Race Road 3 £120

These shoes stand out among a sea of black-and-white shoes, thanks to Pearl Izumi's brave design department. It's an attractive-looking shoe with a neat central Boa-style dial that gives a good secure fit all around the foot and ankle. A grippy sole at the rear is a nice touch and saves the penguin-style walk of some slippery shoes. They come up

small, so go a size up. Stiffness and comfort were on par with others on test, so it should be your style that decides whether you take the plunge with these.



Bold style, but at a high price

www.madison.co.uk



Mavic Ksyrium Elite £130 (£125)

Looking every bit like pro-peloton shoes, Mavic's all-white Kysrium Elites are perfect for your Sunday best rides. The two Velcro straps and ratchet system makes a good all-round fit very easy to achieve, although they are narrow. The carbon composite soles weren't as stiff as B'Twin's, but they were comfortable and a little more forgiving. Although the

pristine white design was a little harder to look after than some other shoes on test, it did scrub up well after the inevitable happened and they got dirty on a rainy ride.

Look the part with this comfortable and great all-round summer shoe



www.mavic.com



FLR 22 £100

The FLR 22 shoes feel a little outdated compared to the rest of the classier-looking opposition in this test because of their chunky construction and basic graphics. The Boa-style dial is bang up to date, though, and fit and comfort were good. A carbon foot-plate on the sole provides a remarkably stiff platform for pedalling, and added a little

kudos on the local club ride, but setting up our cleats was an arduous affair, owing to unhelpful guides.



Good fit and comfort but loses points for tricky cleat positioning

www.flr-shoes.com



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MINI MASSIF

TOTAL DISTANCE 44 MILES

TOTAL ASCENT 1,773 M



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B'Twin 700 £80

These shoes belie their £80 price-tag with the quality of their materials and construction and low, 230g weight. The sole is 90 per cent carbon-fibre, so extremely stiff, with textured grip in the cleat area and polyurethane protectors at the heel and toe. There is breathable mesh at the front and lots of padding

at the rear, with more durable materials on the sides where the shoe may touch the crank. The 700 is a great fit, not too narrow, and has a single Velcro strap and double Boa-style fastening system.

10

Plush, comfortable, lightweight and a bargain price. Perfect

www.btwin.com

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Giro Apeckx £99.99

With generous padding to the uppers, the Apeckx give a fantastic level of comfort. The fit feels close, as opposed to tight, but that's not to say these shoes slip or chafe. Breathability is good, and the extra density means they can cope all year round. For those not wanting to go down the all-black route, there's a black-and-white combination to be had. The nylon soles do a

good job of transferring power, but also brilliantly soak up road buzz. Despite their looks, at 285g each, they're light too, comparing favourably to rival shoes at over twice the price.

11

Understated styling hides the fact the Giro are great shoes

www.giro.co.uk



Vittoria Speed £99.99

Italian-made, and with options of three bling colour-ways, there's no denying the flamboyant Speeds look the part. A secure closing system, stiff nylon sole and minimal padding around the collar, make the shoes feel racy too, although at 345g each they are quite heavy. The range of sizing is good, so finding one to fit shouldn't be an issue; however, they're not the most comfy shoes in

this test. There's little give from the synthetic leather uppers, which combined with minimally breathing vents mean the Speed's race fit could prove to be wearing on longer rides.

7

They look great, but long-term comfort may prove to be a slight letdown

www.chickencycles.co.uk



VERDICT

As soon as we tested B'Twin's 700, we knew there could be only one winner. A good fit, plenty of size options, a stiff — but comfortable — carbon sole, Boa-style dials and, most impressively, they were the most affordable shoes on test. The 700 takes home two awards, Best on Test and also our coveted Best on a Budget — showing a lot of other brands how it's done. *Chapeau* to the French company. In the fight for second place, both Mavic and Giro fought a good fight with excellent pairs of shoes. They were a good match for the test winners on both comfort and style, but both are more expensive than the B'Twin 700. However, with bonus street-cred points attached to Mavic and Giro, you do get a little something extra for your money.



Aluminium cyclo-cross bikes

We pitch a cyclo-cross bike with
a cutting-edge specification
against a Belgian classic

Words Paul Norman Pictures Chris Catchpole

Raleigh RX Pro
£1,500

Tyres

Grippy off-road
tyres on both bikes

Gearing

SRAM 1x loses the
inner chainring

Cyκλο-cross bikes are currently at the vanguard of the technology changes that are permeating the road bike market. In 2013 the UCI announced that disc brakes would be allowed on cyclo-cross bikes used in competition. Manufacturers quickly released a wide selection of disc-braked models to be sold alongside the cantilever-braked bikes that had been the standard for cyclo-cross up to that point. Although disc brakes have been slow to catch on with professional cyclo-cross riders, they have proved very popular with competitors at lower levels in the sport for their consistent braking performance that promotes confidence.

Now cyclo-cross bikes are increasingly being sold with thru axles at the front and often at the rear, too. Thru-axles increase the rigidity of the wheel-to-fork junction and so potentially improve handling — particularly important in loose, off-road conditions. They also make it a lot easier to ensure consistent placement of the brake disc in the brake calipers, so that brake set-up is faster.

A bike that is ridden off-road is not going to reach the same speeds as a road bike, so there is less need for a wide gear range. As a result, cyclo-cross bikes are increasingly being specified with SRAM's 1x single chainring drivetrain. This provides the necessary range but does away with the front derailleur. The chainset and rear derailleur are designed to help keep the chain engaged and under tension on bumpy terrain.

Is this the bike for me?

Cyclo-cross used to be a winter sport only, used by road riders to maintain their fitness levels during the cold, damp, dark winters of northern Europe. But the popularity of cyclo-cross racing has increased enormously in the last few years both in Europe and the United States.

Cyclo-cross is an inclusive sport, with riders of all ages and ability levels being welcomed at open events with no need to sign on in advance. With races lasting for an hour or less, the time commitment is also limited.

A cyclo-cross bike is also a fun way to extend your riding away from the tarmac. Heading off-road along bridleways and lanes that you would hesitate to attempt on your best road bike is great fun — although this is a space also populated by the ever-increasing number of adventure road bikes. Riding on loose, uneven surfaces will improve your bike handling skills and pedalling efficiency, too.

Bikes on test

We've tested two cyclo-cross bikes to see how the latest design trends stack up against a more traditional build. The Raleigh RX Pro is an alloy cyclo-cross bike with a bang-up-to-date specification, including a SRAM 1x single chainring drivetrain, front wheel thru-axle, tubeless-ready tyres and hydraulic disc brakes.

Ridley's X-Bow 10 Disc also has an alloy frame but with a traditional build including a typical 46/36t cyclo-cross double chainset, Shimano 105 shifting and Fulcrum Racing Sport wheels with conventional quick-release hubs and TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes.

Ridley X-Bow 10 Disc
£1,199.99

Cable routing

Cables run along the top tube out of the mud

Brakes

Mechanical disc brakes for extra stopping power

£1,000 upwards What to expect

- Longer wheelbase for off-road stability
- Wide, knobby tyres for grip
- Plenty of clearance for mud
- Disc brakes for consistent stopping power

Raleigh RX Pro £1,500

Aluminium cyclo-cross bike with cutting edge specification

Raleigh has a range of eight cyclo-cross bikes, from its top-flight carbon-framed models through to a more affordable aluminium range. For 2016 many of its bikes have been redesigned to feature 1x drivetrains and front thru-axes. The RX Pro is at the top of the aluminium range and comes with a SRAM Rival 1x groupset with SRAM's HRD hydraulic disc brakes and Cole Rollen disc wheels.

Frameset

The Raleigh's frame is cyclo-cross-specific and is made of hydroformed aluminium with butted tube joints. The fork is a full carbon cyclo-cross design that comes with a 15mm thru-axle to hold the front wheel more securely than a conventional quick-release. There's a tapered headset, which should also ensure steering accuracy. The welds are not fully smoothed out, but nevertheless it's a good-looking bike.

The rear derailleur cable is fixed to the top of the top tube, while the rear brake hose is routed out of the way along the bottom of the down tube. The front brake hose passes into the fork crown and is routed internally.

Components

The Raleigh comes with SRAM's Rival 1x drivetrain. This dispenses with the usual second chainring and front changer by providing a much wider range on the rear cassette. The gear range is similar to a two-ring set-up and overlaps between ranges on the large and small rings are eliminated, but the jumps between ratios are greater. To accommodate the wider-range cassette, the 1x set-up uses a different design of rear derailleur. This has a horizontal parallelogram and a clutch mechanism to ensure that chain tension remains even and chainslap is minimised.

The chainring itself has alternating wide and narrow teeth, which, it is claimed, mesh better with the wide and narrow links in the chain and so hold the



Chainring has alternating wide/narrow teeth

chain more securely than a standard design while promoting mud-clearance.

Wheels

The wheels are Cole Rollen CX. This is a fairly new design and uses 28 J-bend round-section spokes front and rear. The brake discs are attached with the conventional six-bolt design and the hubs have sealed cartridge bearings and alloy axles. At a claimed 1,900g a pair, these are not light wheels but should stand up well to off-road use and be easily serviceable.

They are shod with 33mm-wide Schwalbe X-One cyclo-cross clinchers that have a design with fairly close lugs and an aggressive profile. These are a new tyre from Schwalbe, designed to be set up tubeless but with a reduced amount of sealant needed.

Riding

Hitting the trails on a hot day, I started out carrying the bike to the top of the South Downs. It's quite easy to shoulder, but it did get uncomfortable after a while, as, despite its flat profile, the top tube is quite narrow. Once on top, I progressed at a rapid rate, though. The geometry felt stable on rough surfaces and the bike handled well on fast, flat bridlepaths.

Turning downhill, the Raleigh coped well with bumpy descents and the hydraulic SRAM HRD brakes provided plenty of control. There's that bit more bite and modulation than with the Ridley's mechanical set-up, and the SRAMs need noticeably less effort.

"It felt stable on rough surfaces and handled well on fast, flat paths"

I didn't miss the second chainring. The range of gears offered by SRAM's 1x system is so large that I was able to find a low enough ratio for all but the steepest ascents. Although I spun out on faster roads, this was no different to a two-ring set-up, and the clutch derailleur kept chainslap to a minimum on bumpy terrain, even in higher gears.

The Raleigh's handlebars have grippy rubber-effect tape that has a lot of cushioning, so they were particularly comfortable to hold when riding over bumpy terrain and gave a confidence-inspiring grip. The SRAM hoods were also easy on the hands.

I really liked the Schwalbe X-One tyres. They have a grippy tread profile which worked well in rough, dry conditions; I'd expect them to hang on well in the wet too. They rolled well on the Cole wheels, and even at low pressures didn't bottom out on the rims.

There is plenty of mud-clearance too, so the Raleigh should keep going once winter arrives and the gloop returns. The fork allows plenty of space around the front wheel and there's no shelf behind the bottom bracket — a favourite place for mud to collect.

The matt paint collects dust, though, so the bike needed a wash after each ride — but bike washing is a fact of life if you ride cyclo-cross.

Specification

- Frameset** RX butted aluminium, C5 carbon fork
- Gears** SRAM Rival 1x 11-speed
- Chainset** SRAM Rival 40t
- Brakes** SRAM Rival HRD
- Wheels** Cole Rollen CX
- Tyres** Schwalbe X-One 33mm
- Bars** RSP+ alloy
- Stem** RSP+ alloy
- Saddle** Selle Royal Sirio
- Seatpost** RSP+ alloy 27.2mm
- Weight** 9.73kg/21.45lb
- Size tested** 56cm
- Contact** www.raleigh.co.uk

CA EXPLAINER

Tubeless tyres

The latest trend to sweep the cyclo-cross world is tubeless clincher tyres. Many bikes are coming with tubeless-ready rims that can be easily converted to run without inner tubes. No tubes means no pinch-flats; small punctures will self-seal; and the tyres can be run at lower pressures, improving grip and comfort. Professional cyclo-cross racers typically still use glued-on treaded tubular tyres for their weight advantage and ability to run at very low pressures.

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	19/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	18/20
RIDE COMFORT	18/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	18/20
OVERALL RATING	91/100



Clutch rear mech cuts out chainslap



Cables are top-tube routed



Raleigh's package makes hay while the sun shines — or even when it doesn't

Ridley X-Bow 10 Disc £1,199.99

A classic alloy bike from the Belgian cyclo-cross specialist

Ridley is the pre-eminent Belgian cyclo-cross bike manufacturer, and its top-flight bikes are used by many professionals. The X-Bow 10 disc has the highest spec of Ridley's alloy X-Bow range, with a Shimano 105 22-speed gearset and TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes. There are another three cyclo-cross ranges above it, with 13 bikes (of which five are sold in the UK), showing just how much depth there is in Ridley's stable.

Frameset

Ridley's frame is made of 7005 aluminium alloy. With a wheelbase of just over 100cm and a 72-degree head tube angle, it's designed for a stable ride — important off-road where the ability to hold a line and steer through loose conditions is vital. The frame is predominantly black but subtly incorporates the Belgian flag in its understated design.

The three rear cables are routed across the top of the top tube. This is a classic cyclo-cross design that keeps them away from mud and obstacles to make shifting as efficient as possible. It also makes carrying the bike on one's shoulder far less uncomfortable. The bottom bracket is a conventional threaded design, and the frame has post mounts for the brakes and is equipped with mudguard eyelets. The forks have carbon blades, again with mudguard eyelets, and a tapered alloy steerer.

Components

The X-Bow has a 22-speed Shimano 105 gearset with 105 shifters, front and rear mechs and cassette. It's fitted with an FSA Gossamer chainset with 46/36 chainrings — classic cyclo-cross ratios. The bottom bracket runs on Megaexo bearings and there's a KMC chain. The X-Bow uses TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes. Unlike many mechanical disc brakes, this design presses the pads against the rotor from both sides, potentially making set-up a bit easier.

IN THE KNOW

Tread pattern

One of the major determinants of off-road handling is tyre choice. Professional cyclo-cross riders carry a wide selection with them to match race conditions. On firmer surfaces in dry conditions, a 32mm tyre with a file tread is a good choice. This also works well on sand. When things get wetter or looser, a knobbed tread will handle better, while for very loose conditions or deep mud, a tyre with a more aggressive tread pattern is likely to be chosen.



“It feels super-planted and encourages fast, confident riding over uneven surfaces”

The brake discs are 160mm at the front and 140mm at the rear, as there's more stopping power needed at the front than the back. Other components — bars, stem, seatpost, saddle — come from Ridley's in-house 4ZA brand.

Wheels

Ridley has opted for Fulcrum's Racing Sport wheelset, featuring unbutted spokes and a total weight of around 1,900g, similar to the Cole wheels on the Raleigh. Usually robust, Fulcrum wheels are well built and easy to service.

The wheels are laced with 18 spokes in the front wheel. These are crossed on the disc side but radial on the other to better handle the braking forces generated by the disc. The rear wheel has 24 spokes arranged in Fulcrum's 2:1 pattern. Tyres are Challenge Grifo Plus 32mm — another classic cyclo-cross choice with a tread pattern that grips well in mixed off-road conditions.

Riding

Heading out on to bridle paths, Ridley's cyclo-cross heritage is immediately apparent. The X-Bow feels super-planted and encourages fast and confident riding over rutted and uneven surfaces. The stable ride means that it's easy to control and I never felt any slides even when the paths were damp after rain. Ridley has really got its cyclo-cross geometry completely dialled. Shouldering the bike also felt more comfortable than with the Raleigh, although the top tube is not too wide, it somehow seems to be shaped just right not to dig in.

Part of the Ridley's off-road competence is probably down to the Challenge tyres. There's a reason why they are a cyclo-cross classic — they really cling on well and feel very grippy over rocks and damp ground. The wheels also belie their weight, spin well and feel very strong despite their relatively low spoke count.

The X-Bow stops well too. The TRP Spyre mechanical disc brakes provide solid braking on steep descents, though they lack some of the stopping power and modulation of SRAM's hydraulic set-up and require a firmer lever pull.

On road, you can make steady progress, with the bike feeling lively and responsive with that controlled off-road set-up translating to a stable and assured ride. By cyclo-cross standards, there's also quite a lot of top-end speed from the 46/11 top gear ratio. In contrast, the 36/28 lowest ratio is quite high, and I found myself dismounting for obstacles and ascents that I could ride over with the Raleigh's lower ratios.

Ridley has definitely planned for mud with huge amounts of clearance both front and rear. There's a bridge between the chainstays just behind the bottom bracket that could potentially promote clogging in more muddy conditions. Any such obstruction could also interfere with front shifting, which uses a nylon pulley to route the gear wire to the derailleur.

Specification

- Frameset X-Bow Disc, 7005 alloy, Zornyc disc carbon fork with alloy steerer
- Gears Shimano 105 22-speed
- Chainset FSA Gossamer Megaexo 46/36t
- Brakes TRP Spyre mechanical discs
- Wheels Fulcrum Racing Sport disc
- Tyres Challenge Grifo Plus 32mm
- Bars 4ZA, alloy
- Stem 4ZA alloy
- Saddle 4ZA
- Seatpost 4ZA alloy 27.2mm
- Weight 10.47kg/23.08lb
- Size tested Medium
- Contact www.madison.co.uk

SPECIFICATION LEVEL	18/20
BUILD QUALITY	18/20
ROAD HANDLING	19/20
RIDE COMFORT	19/20
VALUE FOR MONEY	19/20
OVERALL RATING	93/100



Carry-friendly
cable routing



Does what it says
on the frame...



Despite being the cheaper
bike, the Ridley is
outstanding in this field



Ridley proves its pedigree

Ridley's cyclo-cross heritage shines through in the X-Bow. Although it sits towards the bottom of Ridley's range, this is a quality bike with a well thought-out, traditional build. Its geometry is confidence-inspiring and the quality components work well, providing slick shifts and controlled braking.

The Raleigh's spec is bang up to date and really highlights the direction in which cyclo-cross bike design is going. SRAM's 1x shifting is a simple design and makes set-up and maintenance much more straightforward — useful on a bike

that will be getting dirty — as well as saving some weight. The hydraulic brakes are a boon too, leading to solid stopping power whatever the conditions; indeed, they have much more strength and modulation than the Ridley's mechanical set-up.

Tyre choice is important in cyclo-cross bikes, and the Raleigh's Schwalbe X-One are a real all-rounder, with the option to go tubeless. The Challenge tyres on the Ridley are also a terrific choice for mixed off-road conditions.

It's a very close call as to which bike comes out of this test best. While the Raleigh wins on spec, the Ridley gets top marks for its off-road handling and is narrowly the winner. Both these bikes will serve you well and should keep going once the real cyclo-cross season returns this winter.

“Owing to its off-road handling, the Ridley is narrowly the winner”

RIDLEY X-BOW 10 DISC
£1,199.99



93/100

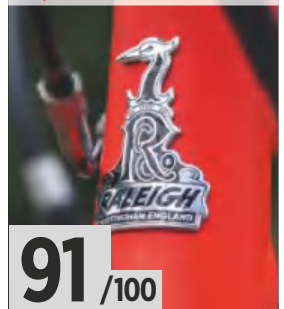
Spot-on...

- Superb off-road handling
- Quality traditional build

Near miss

- High-ish gearing for off-road use

RALEIGH RX PRO
£1,500



91/100

Spot-on...

- SRAM 1x drivetrain and hydraulic disc brakes
- Great wheels and tyres

Near miss

- Not comfortable to carry

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3 OF THE BEST

Women's jerseys

Short-sleeved jerseys are a cycling essential. Here's our pick of three worthy contenders specifically for women, in three different styles — something for all

Words Rebecca Charlton

Long gone are the days when women had to make do with ill-fitting Lycra or being pointed to one unstylish, lonely female-cut jersey in the dark corner of a bike shop. Whether you're after an aero fit, a slightly looser cut or all-day comfort, there's something out there for every female cyclist.

A cycling jersey can really affect your comfort on a ride, so you need the right cut to suit your shape. What's more, hidden details — such as pockets for phone and keys — come in very handy. And no matter what anyone says, we all want to look good while we're cycling, so flattering colours and contours are welcome.

When it comes to fit, getting it right depends on the intended use; after all, we're not all stick-thin climbers or muscular time triallers. Many of us have felt disheartened on not being able to zip up a sparsely proportioned Italian aero jersey, but fear not, they're supposed to be tight. If in doubt, admit defeat and size up.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Fit

Increasingly popular, aero jerseys are designed to fit like a second skin, whereas training and more casual jerseys will offer a more relaxed fit. It's worth having a look at the measurements and intended fit to get the right size for you. Italian designs typically come up smaller than UK brands, so don't be too upset if you have to size up.

Pockets

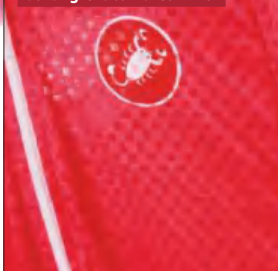
Having at least two reasonably secure pockets is essential for storing food, additional clothing or a mini-pump. Race jerseys tend not to feature a zipper, as you need to reach for fuel quickly in a competitive scenario. Training or more casual jerseys are likely to offer a zipped compartment for valuables such as keys and cards.

Ventilation

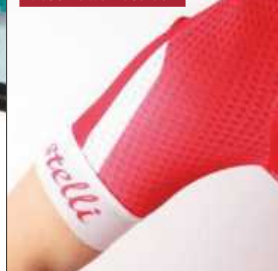
Full zips in women's jerseys are far more common now, and they offer versatility for whipping off the jersey for a comfort break and providing better ventilation on long climbs in summer. Fabric is key, too; look for breathable materials to regulate your body temperature when you're getting a sweat on.



Venting is ideal for summer



Close fit won't suit all



A zipped pocket is a boon



DHB Blok Micro £39.99

Wiggle's in-house brand DHB is synonymous with great value, and this colourful collection for 2015 offers plenty of performance clout too. As seen on Wiggle-Honda pro Annette Edmondson, the Blok range is flattering and really stands out from the crowd. Three pockets with a fourth zipped compartment hold your valuables securely, and the breathable fabric is complemented by a full zip. The silicone gripper holds things in place just above the hips while the sleeves stay put without any additional trimming, meaning no cutting-in.

Bright, stand-out, fun designs and performance features, comfy and 30+UPF



www.wiggle.co.uk

Le Col Women's Sport Jersey £80

Established and run by professional cyclist Yanto Barker, Le Col has thought of everything when it comes to its Women's Sport jersey. Three pockets offer a decent amount of storage, and a fourth zipped compartment can securely contain a large smartphone. There are four designs in total including this vibrant coral design with hi-vis rear stripe. The Le Col Sport jersey delivers all the benefits of the brand's Pro range while providing a more relaxed fit. Flat-locked seams and a full-length guarded zip complete the package.

Developed by a rider and it shows with great looks and performance



www.lecol.net

**CYCLING
ACTIVE
GROUP TEST
WINNER**

Castelli Climber's W Jersey £75

As part of Castelli's Elite performance collection, this jersey is incredibly lightweight and sits close to the skin. If you're looking for kit to take abroad, this is perfect for keeping you cool with absolutely no excess material to flap in the wind. Featuring a built-in under-layer, the jersey is designed to be zipped down without showing your bra. Evident in its three-quarter-length zipper, there's a lot of research and development backing up this jersey, but take care to apply extra suncream if you're going to unzip in the sun as we experienced some redness. It has plenty of pocket space, and is well worth the spend.

Good looks, fit and performance, with sun protection built in



www.saddleback.co.uk

VERDICT

We were impressed with the value for money from Wiggle's in-house brand DHB, and its Blok jersey gains our best on a budget award. It offers everything you need from a summer jersey with standout looks and a wide range of colourways that means you can mix and match with the shorts from the same collection. Castelli provided performance clout and unique added features, as always.

But we had to choose an overall winner, and Le Col's slightly more relaxed fit will suit a wider range of riders, from casual to performance, while flattering all with its range of sizes. The subtle designs look classy without being overly girly. You're spoilt for choice this summer.





MEN OF ORANGE

British bike manufacturer Orange has an enviable reputation; *Steve Thomas* goes behind the scenes at its Yorkshire base to get the inside story of the cult brand from co-owner Lester Noble

Words and pictures: Steve Thomas

Names of companies are sometimes strangely thought out things. They often carry a deep or personal meaning from the founders and are debated and thought out over weeks, even months. In some cases they are on the scratchpad long before the concept and company are figured out.

Branding can make or break a company, so how did Steve Wade and Lester Noble come up with such a simple

yet effective name for their fledgling bicycle company? "We'd already got the company ready and the bikes were in the works, and we were really up against time. We had less than a day to come up with a name, and I like abbreviations. We'd already been talking about the bikes being the 'off-road range' so that was it; the O-range, which came out as Orange," co-owner Noble, revealed.

Orange first hit the British trails in 1988 with the Clockwork, a fitting mantle for its debut bike, named after the 1971

Stanley Kubrick film, *A Clockwork Orange*. To this day, following a short absence, a vastly updated version of that original classic appears in Orange's mountain bike line-up.

Mountain biking was in a stage of alternative and youthful rebellion back then, and almost anything went. The sport's governing body, the UCI, had still to catch on to this dirty sport, although the seeds of the Orange tree had been sewn a few years earlier. "I was part of the Tushingham Sails business, and had



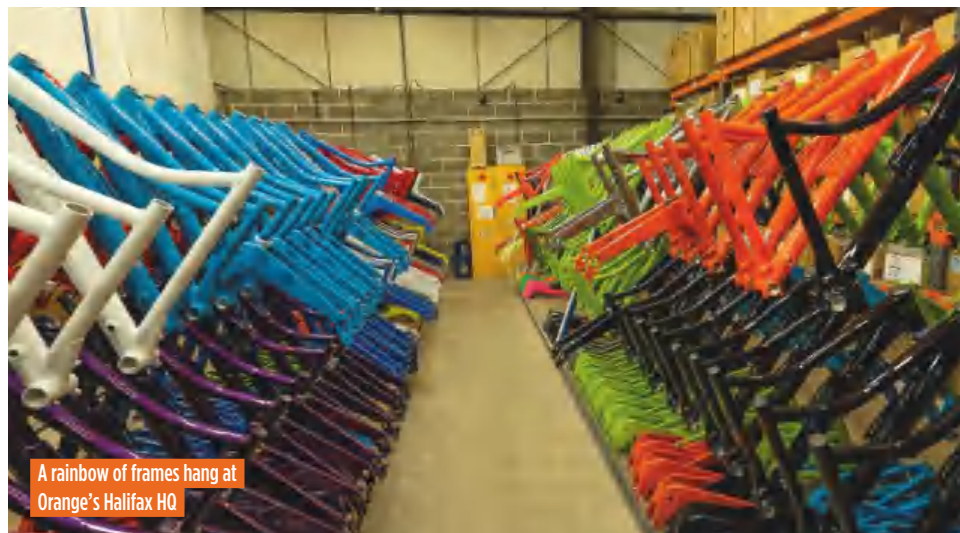
Orange founder Noble's lost none of his passion

sailed and windsurfed competitively in the Lake District for years. I took up mountain biking as a way to keep fit during the winter season," said Noble, modestly omitting the fact that he had sailed at World Championship level.

It was a chance encounter that lured him into mountain biking. "Back in 1984 I was driving through Pateley Bridge in Yorkshire, and saw some cars with bikes on the roofs. They had knobby tyres — I thought 'that looks like fun' and so I went out and found one."

Some of his early rides were taken with his long-time friend Steve Wade, and the pair became gripped by the sport: "I was putting in a lot of time training, and in 1987 I went to the World Championships, the first one to be called the actual World Championships [although official UCI status didn't come until 1990]. I finished 29th and best Brit — it was Ned Overend that won."

By that time he was already designing and building his own bikes. "We had a couple of early Muddy Foxes, and they were good. But around 80 per cent of its customers were in London, and so the bikes started to become more commuter-biased with 74-degree head angles and so on. I didn't think it worked off-road, even for racing."



A rainbow of frames hang at Orange's Halifax HQ



Sheet metal engineering is at the heart of Orange

Not long after, he decided to put his ideas to the market: "At first I had some bikes made up locally and started selling them under the Tushingham brand. After a while I thought 'bikes are OK' — and so decided to leave Tushingham and go it alone." Thus the Orange partnership came to fruition: "I called Steve, we went out for a ride with him and we decided to go into business together. He had just taken over his dad's sheet metal business in Halifax, and so we had the basic engineering back-up there, and that was it."

Growing Oranges

From the outset Orange established itself as a solid player in the niche, and largely independent, UK mtb market of the late Eighties. "We used to go and ride most of the regional and national races and people saw our bikes and started to ask for them. We ended up with quite a presence. From the outside it looked like a big team, but in reality it was just a big bunch of mates riding bikes together in the same kit."

The early crop of Orange bikes was a huge success: "We started with one frame, and then we introduced another made from Tange Prestige tubing — called the Prestige. At that time there



The magic begins with aluminium cut-outs

were two groupsets on the market (from Shimano): XT and DR. Then they came out with the LX and changed DR to DX. This allowed us to offer six custom options with the two frames."

Just a year in and Orange scored its first National Championship win: "One of our dealers was Schmoos Cycles, who also ran one of the best race teams in the UK. They had Tim Davies riding for them, and being a shop team they allowed the riders to choose their own bikes from the shop — he chose an Orange and won the British National Series in 1989, which was a real landmark for us."



Material gains

From the outset, the principal design work on Orange bikes had come from Steve Wade, who used his engineering background, combined with his insatiable appetite for trails, to constantly hone and tweak the range. In 1991 Orange produced its first aluminium frames. “We came up with the Aluminium O, which gave us three more bikes in the range and it was a big success. We also started working with titanium — the Vitamin T.”

Through his sheet metalworking heritage Steve was able to apply years of outside experience to Orange’s aluminium range, and the firm soon began to work on its own monocoque designs, which is where its strength and repute still lie. “We started to fold the sheets into tubes and then weld them, which others were not doing. Also we’ve always used 6000 series aircraft grade aluminium, which goes through a completely different hardening process than 7000 series [which many rival manufacturers use]. This process means that it holds its strength evenly. There is no loss of strength around the welds, which is what makes it so strong and durable.”

A new Formula

During 1993 and 1994 Orange introduced its first full-suspension bikes. “The Formula was our initial bike, and it went from there. By ’96-97 we’d introduced the 628, which had a mechanism which allowed you to flip the shock to give six or eight inches of travel, and that bike was basically the father of all the Orange bikes since then.”

A chance meeting with the Animal team at Eurobike led to Orange sponsoring its downhill team, which ruled the roost in the UK during the late Nineties. Orange and the team also stepped up to help a fledgling young South African junior, who was making his way to the top through the UK scene — Greg Minnaar. “Downhill was really coming into its heyday then, and Greg really came through the ranks on our bike before being ‘poached.’”

Downhill was definitely where it was at during the early 2000s, and Orange was at the forefront. “The Global Racing team was formed in about 2000. They had a big Japanese financial sponsor, and then at the last minute their bike sponsor pulled out. They went to the riders and asked them what they wanted to ride — Greg Minnaar said he wanted to ride the Orange 222. He got his team-mates to try it and that was it. The budget that the team had meant that they were even able to help us with funds to develop the bike, which was great for us.”

With names like Minnaar, Tracy Moseley and Mick Hannah on board, Orange soon became the bike to beat on the downhill circuit. And when living legend Steve Peat decided to race as a privateer, he also went to Orange. “Steve



Every Orange bike is a work in progress

came to us at Interbike, and we were able to put a deal together, so we had him and Global at the time. But through their success they became worth more than we could offer them, so when they eventually went elsewhere we decided to focus more on our trails and XC range.”

Organically grown

Mountain biking has evolved hugely in its short lifespan, and Orange has evolved along with it. “Trails, XC and enduro bikes

are pretty much where our focus lies now.” Although the debate over wheel size has been a major obstacle during the past couple of years. “It’s not been an easy time, with the three different wheel sizes being debated over (meaning numerous frame options need to be covered). It seems that most manufacturers have settled on 650b as being the ideal size; although we are still keeping 29ers in the range as we believe they have merit. It looks like the 26-inch wheel is almost forgotten.”

Most mainstream manufacturers have their bikes produced in huge facilities in Taiwan, which is very economical, especially when compared to the high production costs of UK manufacturing. “We sell around 5-6,000 bikes a year, and have done around that number for many years. About 20 per cent of them are made in Taiwan, the other 80 per cent all come out of our factory in Halifax.”

Needless to say this puts Orange at a distinct financial disadvantage compared to most other brands: “Our average frame cost is about double what it would be if we made it in Taiwan, but UK building does have its positives. We are able to tweak and evolve things as and when we want, and to put things out much faster than others. We’ve not tended to follow the regular manufacturers in terms of putting out bikes all at the same time, when the new groupset and suspension unit comes out

“We sell around 5-6,000 bikes a year. About 20 per cent of them are made in Taiwan, the other 80 per cent come out of our Halifax factory”



Hands-on quality control sets the Brit firm apart



Retro corner traces the brand's evolution

time soon? "We brought out a carbon road bike a couple of years back, made outside, and we were just not happy with the lack of control we had over the building process, so we have been working on our own carbon frames. We're about two years away from being able to produce our own UK-built carbon frames, although that's not to say that we will."

As things stand they are still looking for cracks in the carbon explosion. "We're just not sure it's the right material. Unlike aluminium, where you usually see a crack or a ripple before failure, with carbon it happens internally. You don't know until it happens, and it's a catastrophic failure. There is still a strong band of riders that will not ride carbon — especially for long-travel and enduro riding. We'll need to see how our trials pan out."

In the meantime, both Lester and Steve continue their home-grown evolution process in their own way, as they have always done. "I ride three or four times a week, but Steve rides almost every day. What Steve does is all-mountain biking, not short rides — epic all-day rides on serious terrain, riding the different bikes in the range. Although the names of the bikes may stay the same, each one evolves all of the time — for example the Five has seen around 20 significant changes in the space of 13 years."

If you do get the chance to ride an Orange then do grab it, there is just a certain something about them — which is hard to put your finger on and has to be experienced.

Hitting the road

"In the early '90s we had our first road bike, and had Jonny Clay and Adrian Timmis both riding professionally for us, on and off-road. They won some big UK races on the road, and the bikes got a lot of attention. At that time a lot of the other British pros were also buying our frames through them and then painting and badging them under their sponsors names, as they really liked the bikes," Noble told us.



A road bike harks back... and points to the future



The monocoque is starting to take shape

It was also heading into the glory period for downhill mountain biking and so they focused their resources on familiar territory. "The main thing was that we were just not selling enough. Back then bike shops were usually small one-man set-ups, and were either mtb or road-focused, and our dealer network was mountain biking and so it didn't really take off."

A few years ago they brought out the carbon road bike mentioned earlier which was shelved due to a lack of hands-on control in the carbon-fibre manufacturing process.

A couple of years ago they entered the midfield of the cycling market with the RX9. "It's not really a cyclo-cross bike, more of a roadster, and it's doing OK," said Noble. They have also just added a commuter bike to the range. "The Express-O, a city bike. We decided to go with this and then to reconsider and slowly look towards the road again, with a little more control over the building process."

End

— we put them out when they are ready."

Orange is a British brand through and through, yet a decade ago it was dominating the world downhill scene, and still has a cult-like status outside of the UK: "We have had distributors and dealers all over the world — on and off. But because of our manufacturing process, our bikes work out expensive for export outside of Europe."

Organic does have its price tag to match: "Most manufacturers order their bikes from a plant in Taiwan; that means that they are able to order hits and schedule them when they want them, and then a royalty is put on them and a distributor gets them direct from the factory, which makes things much cheaper, and easier on cash-flow."

On the other hand you have Orange's home-grown business model: "We have a factory which needs to be working at the same rate year-round, we're not in the "hire 'em and fire 'em" business, so we make the same number of bikes in winter as we do in summer. Now many manufacturers have a single European distribution base — and so bikes go direct to dealers and even customers from there — which is something we have just started to implement."

Future proofing

Carbon-fibre has become the material of choice for many manufacturers in recent years — will we see carbon Oranges any

Boxing clever

How does the new Buxum Tourmalet stack up against CA's old favourite box, the trusty and secure BikeBoxAlan?

Words & photos: Tom Isitt and Jesse Wild

If you're doing any kind of overseas sportive or want to take your bike somewhere warm and sunny, the chances are you will need a bike box. Sure, you can create a DIY box out of pipe lagging, duct tape and a cardboard delivery box from your LBS, but if your bike is worth several thousand pounds, you might want some extra protection.

Up till now, pretty much every test of bike boxes in any magazine or cycling website has concluded that the BikeBoxAlan (BBA) offers the best protection for your money. Yes, there are cheaper and lighter ones available. But for best-value protection, the BBA has been the go-to box for some years.

So when Buxum launched its range of aluminium bike boxes, aimed squarely at the upper end of the bike box market, we wanted to

find out how they compared with the established favourite. We booked some flights to Toulouse and took two bikes to the Pyrenees, one in the BBA and one in the Buxum Tourmalet.

Alan vs Buxum

The BikeBoxAlan set the standard for hard-shell boxes. It is a polycarbonate clamshell design, with recesses in the lid for the wheels. The frame lies on its side in the base, with Velcro straps to secure everything in place. There is an anti-crush bar that locates between the base and the lid, meaning the box won't collapse even if numerous heavy cases are stacked on top of it. Empty, the BBA weighs in at 12.04kg on the office Park Tools scales.

The Buxum Tourmalet works in a slightly different way. You still need to take the wheels,



Suitcase-style opening is the standard design



BikeBoxAlan: a design classic



Packing into the BBA is easy



Basic caster wheels are fine



pedals, handlebars and seatpost off, as with the BBA, but the lid lifts off and in the bottom half are quick-release mounts front and rear, into which you slot your bike's forks and rear dropouts (the rear one is adjustable to fit frames up to 61cm). The wheels go either side, and then a bracing rod sits across the middle to strengthen the whole structure.

The box itself is constructed from aluminium sheets, with the corners heavily reinforced for strength. The catches are also beautifully constructed, and should last for ever. The Tourmalet weighs in at 13.49kg as measured on our scales.

Packing pace

Even those of us with limited mechanical nous can get either of these bike boxes packed in under 15 minutes. Wheels off, seat and seatpost off, pedals off, stem and bars off, job's a good 'un. Securing the bike in the BBA is simply a matter of tightening the relevant Velcro straps, whereas in the Buxum you slot the forks and rear dropouts into the appropriate mounts.

With the bike lying on its side in the BBA, you might want to use fork and rear dropout spacers

just to protect those areas from crush damage, but it shouldn't be strictly necessary if the anti-crush bar does its job. It should be noted that getting the BBA's anti-crush bar correctly located can be a bit fiddly. It's also a bit of a faff adjusting the QR for the front forks in the Buxum. Both boxes can be secured with TSA-approved locks so that airport security can check the contents if they need to.

On the move

Both boxes are easy to move around, each featuring handholds at each end on the top (the Buxum has some very stylish sprung handles); and they both have caster wheels at the front for easy steering, and fixed wheels at the back.

In the interests of research, we took the boxes to Heathrow in the back of a VW Passat estate (an easy fit with the rear seats folded), but brought them home on the Tube. They both proved easy to move around, and kept within the British Airways maximum of 23kg.

Of the two, the Buxum is marginally easier to use; its wheel bearings are brilliant and the box has a flat top on which you can balance other luggage. That said, there really isn't much in it.



The Buxum's wheels rolled beautifully



Heavy-duty catches on the Buxum

CONCLUSION

Both these boxes are sturdily constructed, simple to use, and survived with only minimal scuffs and no damage to either bike. At £680 (more than £250 more than the BBA) delivered to the UK, the Buxum Tourmalet is not cheap. But it is immensely stylish, looking more like something that a rock band roadie or film crew might use. The quality of construction is fabulous, and if you've spent upwards of £5,000 on a bike, you'll no doubt want a suitably protective box. This may be it.

Ultimately, though, for most people the BikeBoxAlan is still the go-to box. It may not be quite as lovely as the Buxum, but it does the job perfectly. The BBA is lighter, *relatively* inexpensive (from £415), and comes with a seven-year guarantee.



Traditional clips are safe and strong



The Buxum exudes quality

ASK CYCLING ACTIVE

Welcome to Fitness Q&A, where our coaches and nutritionists are on hand to help you. Each month, we answer your queries, problems and dilemmas so you can enjoy your cycling worry-free. Send your questions to robert.hicks@timeinc.com

CA EXPERT



This month, Level 3 British Cycling coach Rob Mortlock answers your fitness questions

Red alert

Q I give blood every 12 weeks, which is the recommended minimum period between donations. How does this affect my cycling fitness? What can I do to help reduce adverse effects? *Simon Tuck, email*

A The process of donating blood may leave you feeling a little weak and run-down. Most medical organisations recommend leaving off exercise for at least a day after donating. This is because approximately 10 per cent of your blood volume is taken, including valuable red blood cells. It's these

blood cells that play a key role in supplying your muscles with oxygen, and some studies suggest that it can take up to five weeks before red blood cells are adequately replaced — though this varies between individuals and depends on the intensity of training you are doing.

It makes sense that, during this period, performance at high intensity will be reduced, and that recovery from exercise will take longer. However, lower-intensity exercise should not be greatly affected, apart from a slightly raised heart rate and breathing rate. To optimise your recovery after donating blood, to avoid risking your health, there are some steps you might consider taking:

Hydrate well before and after the donation; add electrolyte supplements to your drinks, if required. Fuel yourself intelligently; take on adequate carbohydrate to make up for the energy loss; and replenish glucose levels by eating something sweet. Consider eating iron-rich foods during this time.

Use a heart-rate monitor during training, as it'll be invaluable in helping you make sure you stay within the lower intensity workout zones in the days following giving blood. It may also be a good idea to keep the workout intensity low leading up to the donation, and take a few rest days beforehand so you can bounce back afterwards.

If giving blood has prolonged negative effects on your fitness and ability to train and recover, you may want to explore the possibilities of donating blood platelets and/or plasma, where only those components of the blood are taken (red cells are returned).

Back to basics

Q I keep getting back pain. One friend says it's my core that is weak, while others believe it's to do with my bike fit. Can you clear up what's the cause? *Emma Brooks, Tonbridge*

A It could be either of those things, or both, or neither. Both lower and upper back pain is common among cyclists, but it's often difficult to nail down the exact cause.

The forward-leaning position while cycling may result in a shortening of the hip-flexor muscles. Similarly, less

than adequate trunk (AKA 'core') strength may cause riders to develop a curved or humped back position, which not only increases the chances of lower back pain and stiffness, but also tends to distribute more weight on to the arms and hands. This may result in upper back, shoulder and neck problems.

The solution, in most cases, is to improve the flexibility in the hip-flexor muscles and strengthen the lower abdominals by doing some off-bike stretching and gym sessions. It's advisable to stretch the hamstrings and glutes regularly anyway as these are, particularly in cyclists, notorious for becoming tight.

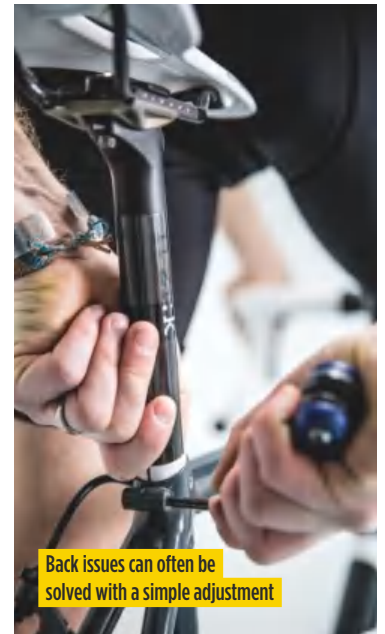
Similar posture imperfections may be exacerbated or even caused by the bike's fit. If handlebars are set low and close to the body, this can make you cramped and cause the back to bend. If bars are too high, a rider tends to sit very upright, placing all the bodyweight on the lower back and



Hydration is always important but even more so after giving blood



A bike fit can make a huge difference to long-term comfort



Back issues can often be solved with a simple adjustment

Should I be worried? Alan Rodger, Surrey

Although light-headedness during and after exercise is fairly common, particularly with intensive workouts, the causes are not always immediately obvious. There are several reasons why you may be experiencing this, and it's probably best to look at the simplest ones first.

Hydration is almost certainly the most commonly neglected aspect of nutrition among amateur riders. Be sure to take on at least 500ml of water before your session, then an additional 500ml for every hour of exercise, and more if it's particularly hot. Don't forget that you also lose minerals through sweat, so water alone may not be enough. Use an electrolyte additive in your drink in this case.

If you don't have enough energy to fuel the workout, you can often experience dizziness and light-headedness. Remember to eat enough carbohydrate beforehand in order to keep your energy levels up. Consider that you should also be refuelling as you ride; a cereal bar every 45 minutes should suffice.

In terms of workout intensity, it's usual to experience light-headedness when you are really pushing your effort level to the max. Remember, though, before undertaking maximal efforts, it's vital to put in many hours of low-intensity exercise in preparation.

If you are worried about the light-headedness and it is still happening even at low or moderate intensity riding, you may wish to see your doctor.

The feeling could be an indicator of a medical condition, which may need attention. Besides, a health check may provide a good indicator of general fitness and provide you with an action plan for a healthy lifestyle, which will ultimately help you improve your fitness.

CA recommends Torq Snack Bar (Dark Chocolate and Banana Chip)

Torq is keen to stress that this isn't an out-and-out energy bar. On the front of the packaging, it says 'cold-pressed luxury Snack Bar created as an indulgence for the physically active'. On the back, it reads, 'Although Torq has formulated this luxury product to provide a useful energy source, don't hold back on indulging yourself with this bar alongside a nice cup of tea or coffee.' Whatever the marketing flannel, each 55g bar contains 34.6g of carbohydrates, which is more than most energy bars so it's well worth taking on a ride.

We're not so sure it'd be our first choice to dunk in our Earl Grey, though.

£1.99

www.torqfitness.co.uk

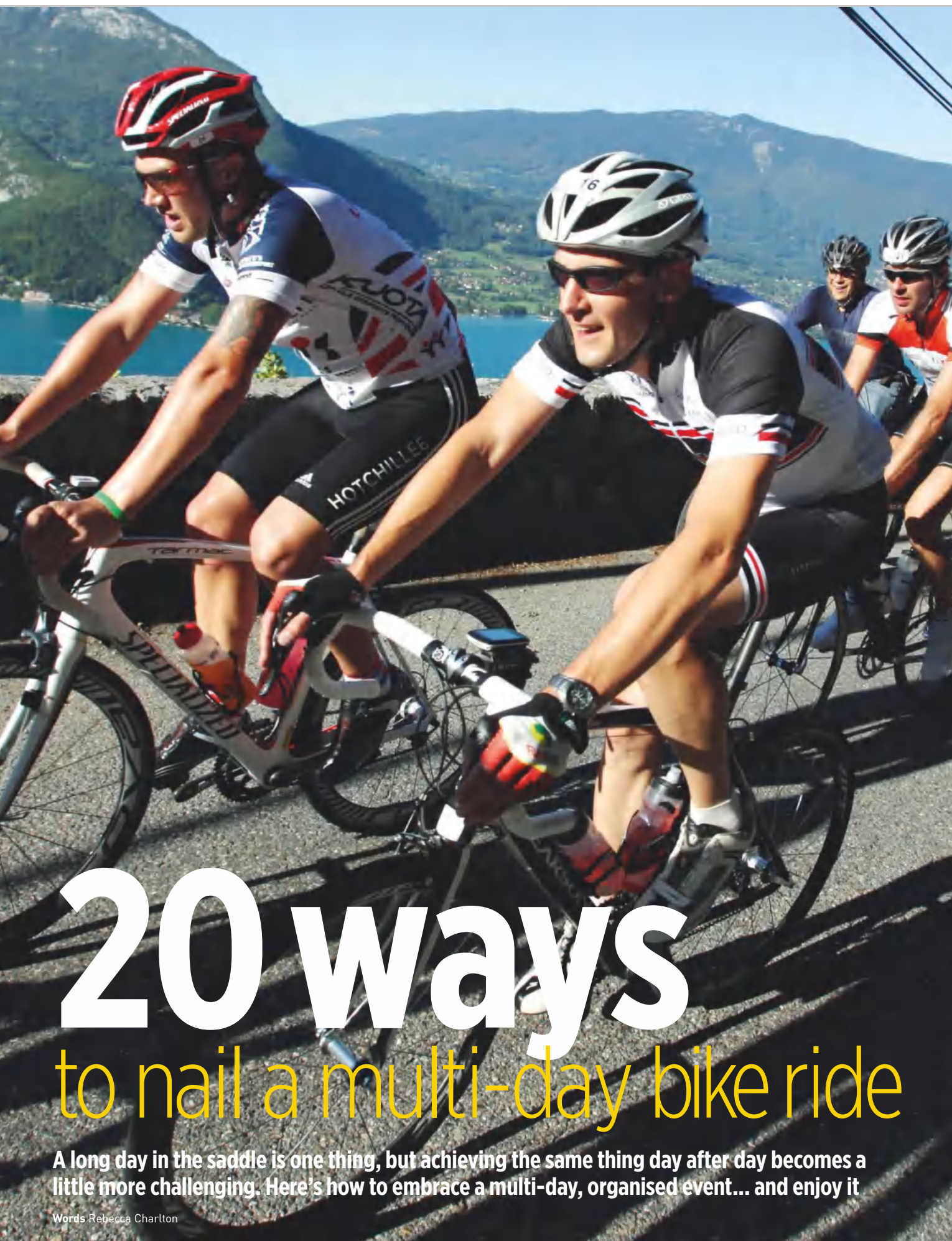


failing to engage the trunk muscles in a supporting role. In addition to problems with the lumbar region, this makes the rider far less aerodynamic, which for those seeking a level of performance from their riding is very undesirable. Saddle height and setback can create problems, especially if you are over-extending to reach the pedals at the bottom of the pedal stroke.

A good course of action would be to begin with the bike fit, to make sure that it isn't the main cause of your back pain. If problems persist, visiting a sports physiotherapist would be a good plan — they're able to advise on specific exercises and stretches that you can do to alleviate pain caused by tight and damaged muscles.

Dizzying speed

Q If I pedal really hard, I get light-headed. Is this because I'm unfit or because there is something wrong with me?



20 ways to nail a multi-day bike ride

A long day in the saddle is one thing, but achieving the same thing day after day becomes a little more challenging. Here's how to embrace a multi-day, organised event... and enjoy it

Words Rebecca Charlton



1 Preparation

The type of preparation you put in can really make a difference to your enjoyment of a multi-day event.

With so many of us being stretched for time, specific training helps put your time to optimum use. No matter how hard you've trained, if you haven't ever ridden at least two days back-to-back at a similar intensity and length, you could fall flat on the day. So tailor your training to suit the task ahead.

2 Saddle

Be confident in your saddle selection; you need a saddle you can sit on for hours on end without discomfort. Many good bike shops will let you try before you buy and that's the best way to find the right one for you. Using a brand new contact point on event day could wreak havoc with your comfort, so avoid this at all costs.

3 Chamois care

Once you've found the right saddle, it's time to think about the next step in keeping your backside comfy. A good pair of shorts is vital, but also consider that you could need a set for each day. Using antibacterial chamois cream is useful but should never be a substitute for a clean set of shorts. Either put on a fresh pair or give them a thorough clean and dry before the next stage, otherwise you could risk nasty sores.

4 Ride with others

The chances are, you'll be riding in a group in one form or another, so it's worth practising riding in a bunch. It's inevitable that you'll have to fit in some solo sessions, but going out with other riders can be a reality check; they'll often push you harder than you can achieve alone.

5 Sleep

Accept that you may not have the ideal sleeping arrangements in hotels, hostels or camping.

Nonetheless, hitting the sack as soon as you can could be key to recovering well for the following day. You may find yourself rooming with a snorer and struggle to nod off — but getting into bed and resting is far better than staying on your feet in the hotel bar.

6 Be selfish

When you're hungry, tired or in pain on a multi-day event, you have to put yourself first. No one wants to feel antisocial, but being overly polite may mean forgoing a massage or eating later than you'd like. You have to look after number one, as everyone has individual needs and different levels of fatigue when the going gets tough.

7 Get the Lycra off!

Sitting around in your sweaty cycling kit is a bad idea for a couple of reasons. It's easily done at the end of a tough stage, but the sooner you can shower and change, the better. Firstly, in damp kit your core temperature is liable to drop, and that's bad news for your recovery; what's more, staying in dirty kit is really unhygienic and can lead to saddle sores.

8 Cadence

Gear selection can play an important part in how you cope during long back-to-back days of riding. If you grind a big gear in attempts to keep up, your legs may tire sooner. Spinning a lighter gear at a higher cadence can help with active recovery. Where safe to do so, try to turn the pedals lightly on flats and gradual descents to 'flush out the rubbish' before the next climb. ➤



Famous landmarks can help with that last big push



Enjoy your ride — but do concentrate on the wheel in front!

“What’s your top tip for surviving a multi-day ride?”

Steve Edwards @steveedwardsz

Chamois cream, more chamois cream and a little more chamois cream, eat well and stretch!

Scotty @Scottworld

Treat it as a total long ride... not day by day. (Don't blow up at the end of each day to get to the finish.)

Lesley Pinder @Skipinder

Sleep as much as you can. Remember to eat lots as you ride — you're eating for the next day as well.

Jo Burt @VecchioJo

Wash, eat, feet up as soon as possible.

Matt Dunn @_MattDunn

Foam-roll and stretch big-time every night and take a healthy dose of HTFU.

Nigel Crissell @NCrissell

Jelly babies and jelly beans. Oh, and beer in the evening.

Sarah Strong @opiumia

Avoid stairs where possible.

Tanya Griffiths @TanyGriff

Eat well, but don't make the mistake of eating as much as you can. You'll come back weighing more than when you left.

Steve Wood @stevewood_GUC

Eat well, drink well, sleep well and enjoy.

9 Eat well

Dipping into energy deficit is bad news because it won't just have an immediate effect; you may feel like you're running on empty on the subsequent days too. We're not saying stuff your face, but keep an eye on how much you're replenishing your glycogen levels. A rule of thumb is topping up with 30-60g of carbohydrate per hour on long rides.

10 Taper

Chances are you've put in a fair bit of riding ahead of your target event but beware of undoing that hard work. You don't need to put your feet up in the days leading up to the event, but you do need to taper. You'll accumulate fatigue during the event, so you want to avoid going in tired at all costs. A common mistake is panic-training right up to the event,



Recovery meals should be packed with nutritious, whole foods

thinking you can get some extra benefit. The final week should be a combination of rest and keeping your legs ticking over. CA expert Rob Mortlock says: "Reduce the volume but keep doing some high-intensity, so it's not a shock to the body come the event."

11 Hydrate
When you're riding on the rivet, focusing on maintaining contact with a group or experiencing fatigue beyond your comfort zone, it's hard to think about anything other than simply keeping up. However, it's important to satisfy your thirst by drinking often. Adding an electrolyte tab or some energy powder to your bottle may prove useful, helping your body to absorb the fluid and better hydrate.

12 Recovery
You need to take all the help you can get when it comes to recovery. Massage, protein and carb-rich foods eaten at the right times, and plenty of shut-eye will all help you recover for the following days' exertions. Use those all-important hours before you have to climb back on the bike again wisely or you'll sabotage all the hard work you've put in.

13 Pick a group that's suitable
Let's be honest, there's a lot of thoughts that go through your mind when you're asked to assess your cycling ability. There's a part of you that really wants to wear the badge of honour that comes with selecting the 'fast' group, while the doubter in you calls for a modest pace to limit the chances of being dropped or slowing people down. Be honest with yourself and go for a group that will challenge you but that won't leave you hanging on like your life depends on it. This is easier if you have an accurate sense of where you're at compared to others. Prepare with others who are also doing the event, and keep an eye on your average pace if that's a requirement during the stages.

14 Pace yourself
You are going to be on the bike for a very long time, so if you're struggling in the first part of the day, you need to make it known to your ride leader or a fellow rider. This will indicate you need to move into a more suitable group or, if you're already in the slow group, to ask for assistance. Suffering in silence won't make for an enjoyable ride, and there will be someone happy to help.



15 Bike service
The last thing you need when you've put in the physical preparation is to have to put up with a clicking and clunking groupset. A well-maintained bike will help you to keep up with others and enjoy the event to the full. Mechanicals can be severely energy-sapping, as you have to sprint back on after a puncture or waste power with sticky brakes or a flat tyre. Come prepared in bike and body.

16 Use the wheels, don't be a hero
If you're the strongest rider in your group or feeling good, you may be tempted to do all the work on the front or increase the pace — but this may leave you with little gas in the tank on the latter stages. Rotate through the group and use the wheels of others to shelter and take a rest when you need it.

17 If you have a problem, let someone know
The sooner you can put your hand up or shout that you have a puncture or mechanical, the better. It will help you to receive assistance and get back to the group quicker.

18 Wear the right clothing
If you're doing an event such as London to Paris, the weather can be extremely changeable, so it's a good idea to pack versatile wardrobe additions such as arm and leg-warmers and a wind-shell. Getting caught in the rain could wipe the smile from your face for the rest of the day.

19 Know what's up ahead
Depending on what motivates you, it may be worth taking a good look at what to expect from each stage to familiarise yourself with the big climbs and challenging sections. If you prefer to take each day as it comes, fair enough.

20 Enjoy it!
Last but certainly not least, remember that cycling is fun. The more relaxed you are on entering a multi-day sportive, the better. Anxiety can affect your sleep and posture, so remember all the wonderful benefits — and keep smiling. **End**

Beating Blood Cancers London to Paris

We're heading out to ride from London to Paris with Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research this September as part of an organised, led ride, so we'll be putting all of this into practice. As the event fast approaches, it's sold out for 2015, but Beating Blood Cancers have a number of great fundraising cycling events throughout the year. Find out how you can get involved at: www.leukaemialymphomaresearch.org.uk.

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Beating Blood Cancers

Hills are the best, and climbing is part of the joy of cycling. They call it beautiful agony and, knowing how belligerent you are, I know they won't beat you.

Look son no hands!

Can a cycling-obsessed son repay decades of motherly 'advice' and convince his mum that she needs a lifestyle change with a road bike. She may have never ridden more than 10 miles but, under duress, has agreed to sign up to something more substantial

Words Kathryn James & OJ Borg
Photos Carl Sukonik/Vain Photography,
Chris Payne/ Great Cycle

Let's start with a truth bomb. My mum's a total ball-ache when it comes to the latest fad. Over the course of my life, she's been on a steady rotation of the 'next new thing', from sports to diets to fitness crazes. Those daily spoonfuls of molasses that marked her health food fad, the recurring trampette age, the horror of the macrobiotic period, the Zumba years, and the big daddy of all of them, the Atkins phase, which still reverberates even now.

The problem is that she, as a writer, has a very sedentary lifestyle. Combine that with her milestone age — which I promised her I wouldn't mention but which is somewhere north of 59 but isn't yet 61 — she has found herself unhappy with her weight and fitness at a time of life when it's most important to keep in fine fettle. Why not repay the 36 years of lectures, I figured, by getting her to take up cycling?

This might take a bit of convincing. I knew, as she witnessed the results of my first triathlon, when my front wheel came off, leaving me in an unconscious heap on the side of the road. But, believe it or not, that's what got me hooked on cycling.

It has become not just the way I get around but the way I keep fit, enjoy life and define myself. It has been a life-changer for me, and if it worked for me, could it work for her?

Can I turn my mother into the female equivalent of a mamil in three months?

Kathryn James: I can never resist a challenge, even after I hear OJ mumbling something about a 'hundred-mile

As a youngster, I used to easily cycle up Leicester's hills. But nowadays I can't do hills at all. Is there any hope for me regaining anything like my younger legs?



sportive', 'hill-climbing' and 'cleats'. I don't think he realises how unfit I am. He bikes up mountains for what I can only guess must be fun. While the last ride I did lasted about five minutes before my bum started aching, and then I was overtaken by an old man on a rusty folding bike while he was texting.

I've been told I have slight arthritis of the knee, and have been advised to bike or swim. If I don't want my knees to get worse, I have to start exercising again, so why not cycling?

I used to cycle in my youth, so I did a bit of research, and found that the human body is so adaptable that people can start training at an older age and become fitter than their younger selves. This is encouraging. But will I be the only female baby boomer out there on the roads? The stats say that fewer women in the UK cycle compared with countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands. But what about older women?

Nowadays, women my age want to stay fit and active. So how many of us are cycling on the roads? The answer is not enough, apparently, and the reason for that might be the dangers. Even though it's probably safer for me to get out there and get fit than stay in and become a couch potato, it's still daunting. So, I'll spend three months training and then do a sportive.

I am going to do all this without consuming carbs because I want to lose weight as well. I have been reading up on high fat and protein versus high carb. What do you think?

OJ Borg: I think that you need to get over this fixation with carbs, which is almost as annoying as your obsession with Leslie Kenton in the early Nineties. Yes, we possibly eat too many carbs, but say that to me again when you are mid-bonk when your glucose levels are low and you run out of energy.

KJ: As a youngster, I used to easily cycle up Leicester's hills. But nowadays I can't do hills at all. Is there any hope for me regaining anything like my younger legs?

OJB: Hills are the best, and I would say climbing them is part of the joy of cycling. They call it beautiful agony and, knowing how belligerent you are, I know that a hill won't beat you. Plus, it just called you fat!

KJ: Is Lycra important? And will it fit me?

OJB: Lycra is not just important, it's imperative. Part of this whole endeavour is to give you the chance to experience all the things that go with being a cyclist, including the multitude of emotions that happen when looking at yourself in a mirror the first time you put on something with a race fit.

I mentioned what you are doing to Rapha and they have hooked you up with a full outfit, which will make you look the part, if nothing else — and, as you never have the right gear, maybe getting some might change you. We also need to talk about underpants — specifically, not wearing any, which isn't the conversation that I thought we'd ever have to have again.

KJ: The last time I rode, it was on a mountain bike that seemed to be made out of dark matter. Can I get one of those sleek-looking machines now?

OJB: Well, luckily for you, Chris Garrison, UK media relations guru at Trek Bicycle Corporation, was able to recommend the perfect bike, the Trek Silque SL. It's not only lighter than my bike but also has a better groupset and wheels, which is not how this was supposed to go. Chris also provided some great tips on dipping your toe in the water as a female cyclist:

"The best way to start cycling, regardless of age, is to find a great local bike shop, one that provides a high level of service and is committed to being a resource for people who cycle," he said.

"For my part, I consult with retailers about how to make their stores more women-friendly, as the experience a woman has at a retailer can be the difference between her adopting cycling for a lifetime or avoiding the sausage-fest — most shops are owned by men, managed by men, largely staffed by men, and can be very intimidating for women.

"So find a great store that is committed to being a resource for everyone who cycles," he continued. "A great shop will help identify the individual's desires and goals and match them to the right bike for the job.

"Too often we see people using mountain bikes on the roads, and though it's true that they will do the job, there are better options to make trips more enjoyable.

"Bikes are like shoes: it's entirely possible for something to look amazing but cause pain and discomfort. This is a deterrent, and can make someone stop riding.

"It's the job of a bike shop to make sure that this doesn't happen, and to work with people as they gain experience and start to try new types of riding."

Now knowing that your previous bikes have included mine, my brother's and that Emelle thing that smelt of milk, you will have the right steed to take this on.

KJ: What training schedule should I stick to?

OJB: Well, I am terrible at sticking to training plans and, as I'm related to you, I know that

they may not work for you. Also, this is about a lifestyle change; training plans give you a short-term view, whereas just going out to push yourself — for the joy of it — is possibly more beneficial. Also, your ride is only 40km and, more importantly, I don't have any training plans.

KJ: With my questions answered but my fear of the roads not yet quelled, it's time to start training. I've never had the right gear before, so to have a full Rapha outfit including matching socks is a motivational boost before the riding has even begun.

"There's a problem, though. When my first book was published, another author warned me that authors may gain half a stone in weight per book.

Four books later, and I am not the right shape to wear anything that has the word 'racing' in the title, however beautiful it is. So I'll keep the padded leggings and take off the skin-tight top and wear a baggy T-shirt. It is my goal to wear the rest of the gear at the sportive. I'm hoping low carbs and cycling can do it. I've decided not to weigh myself, as I can't face it, but I'll know if I've lost weight, as I'll be able to zip up my lovely jacket.

As instructed, I installed Strava on my phone and set out on my new racer. I now realise that every bike I've ever owned has been a shire horse compared to the swift thoroughbred I've been loaned. I go up a very small hill without noticing, and I haven't even got the gears figured out yet. I mean, what sort of gears don't clunk and rattle when you change them?

The downsides are that I feel a little nervous cornering on slender tyres instead of the hulking wheels I'm used to. And I cannot get both feet in the toe-clips no matter how hard I try.

Strava tells me that I have ridden 10k. I put it on my Facebook page so all my friends can see it and 'like' it. Only one person likes it and that's OJ. I assume everyone else is jealous of my achievement.

At the weekend, I join up with two more ▶



Ready, set, go! OJ and Kathryn prepare to take on their ride

cyclists and we start on our longer rides, between 25 and 30km, to build up stamina.

The Great Manchester Cycle Ride

OJB: So, this is the event I chose for mum. It falls at the right time, and it's right for her level of fitness after the three months of training rides. I was being far too excitable trying to get a novice cyclist to do 100 miles with lots of climbing in it. I still think she could have done it, as she hates quitting, but there isn't that much enjoyment in riding those sorts of distances, especially the first time, and it might have killed off her love of cycling in one fell swoop.

KJ: I'm nervous. Yes, the Lycra now fits; I'm wearing a Rapha vest, top and rainproof jacket, which is handy because rain is forecast, this being Manchester. And yes, we're riding on closed roads, which is going to be heavenly. But what if everyone is pushing me out of the way because I'm slow? What if I come last? Will I be able to stop if I get tired? In fact, there will be no stopping at all if my

son has his way.

We have to cover the first lap quickly or we'll be barred from the second lap. I've never heard of a sweeper van and don't intend to meet one; either way, it's not the thing to calm my nerves.

I'm struck by the camaraderie as we move through the crowds near the start line. I've never taken part in a mass participation event before and I thought it might be super-competitive. Not so. There are people of all ages and sizes and everyone's enjoying themselves, even though the rainclouds are looming in the sky.

OJ and I are starting at the very front and we take up our positions in front of some very pro-looking riders, the one behind me has those straight parallel bars instead of proper handlebars. I wonder how many seconds it will be before he overtakes me after the whistle goes.

Well, the whistle goes, and my fear of falling straight off does not happen. We cycle in first place for almost 20 seconds before the baying crowd start to stream past. With OJ beside me, I ride at a faster pace than usual.



I loved it. I got to ride alongside my boy, something we haven't done since his teenage years. I found undiscovered pockets of energy in myself.

People are still streaming by us, but some are riding at my speed.

I chat to one chap for whom, like me, signing up for this ride has been a challenge to get fit and lose a bit of weight. He nearly didn't enter the event because he felt people would laugh at him. It seems beginner cyclists have similar unfounded fears, and sportives like this are so friendly; no one judges anyone else... or if they do, they are so far ahead I can't hear them.

I make it round that first lap in time and off

Kathryn's cycling revelations

■ Padded shorts are the best invention ever.

■ The distance ridden in kilometres sounds so much better than in miles.

■ Cycle-paths are better than roads, but they are prone to ending without warning. This happens on our first long ride from Leicester to Cropston reservoir. The last time I cycled to the reservoir, OJ was a teenager. I don't remember being nervous of the roads back then, but I am now, so we set off along cycle-paths until they come to an abrupt halt for no apparent reason, and we have to cycle the rest of the way on the roads.

■ Not all cycle-paths are equal. Cycle-paths are often not good for road bikes. Yes, Rutland Water, I'm talking about you, with your horrible gravelly paths round the lake. So check before you go that they are suitable for road bikes.

■ Shared cycle-paths can be a nightmare. My main training route is shared by dog-walkers, pedestrians and cyclists. Up until now, I've been a walker, annoyed by cyclists who weave silently behind you as though they have no vocal chords, or ring their bells

imperiously and make you jump on to the verge. So now I'm a cyclist I always remember to politely say 'excuse me' as I go by. However I still get dirty looks, or their dogs wander in front of me, or they don't hear me and still don't move so I end up silently weaving behind them. I'm thinking of getting a bell.

■ Clinging to the kerb when riding on roads is not recommended. Ride boldly. On my first ride on the road, I try to stay as near to the kerb as I can, so that I don't get knocked off. But OJ tells me that this is more dangerous than claiming your place on the road. Stats say that proportionately more women than men are killed on the road, possibly because they don't ride as aggressively.

■ Women shouldn't hug the kerb before swerving out to pass parked cars. Even though I know this now, I still find it hard to do. Apparently women cyclists are an 'indicator species' for how bike-friendly a city is. Out on the roads, I see many more men than women, but when we're on cycle-paths there are more women. I now wish I lived in Copenhagen, where you can nip out on your bike without fearing for your life.

■ Half the fun of cycling is nipping to the pub at the halfway mark. Is this allowed for serious cyclists?

■ OJ tells me that stops for cakes and coffee are part of some unfathomable code called 'The Rules'. Good news for most, but not for me, because I am still maintaining a low-carb, high-protein and fat diet. I'm convinced that this is the best way to get that Rapha jacket finally zipped up.

■ Toe-clips are impossible to use. I have tried but can't get used to them. Only once did I manage to ride along and get both of my feet in the straps — before slowly falling over to one side, feet still firmly in them. I was worried that OJ wanted me to ride the sportive with clip-in shoes, but I finally convinced him I'm better off not clipped in.

■ Even if you can't be arsed at the beginning of a ride, by the end you'll be glowing and happy. This has never happened to me when I swim or walk. But somehow cycling makes you feel invigorated, however tired you are.



I'm seriously impressed and proud of you. You even looked like a cyclist when you got on the drops, eyes fixed against the Manchester weather.

Happy faces all round as the duo reach the finish line

we go on the second. I'm hoping OJ might let me slow down now, but we stop only to take off my jacket because the sun's shining. No standing around eating bananas for us; we eat protein balls as we pedal.

OJ is insisting we do a sprint finish. I try but it's not going to happen. We cross the finishing line in style, though, with me in 900th place overall, but 11th in my age and gender group — possibly because there were only 10 other women my age in the race... If so, many were missing out.

Kathryn's conclusion

KJ: I loved it. I got to ride alongside my boy, something we haven't done since his teenage years. I found undiscovered pockets of energy in myself. After a few minutes' rest, we rode part-way home along the Ashton canal.

OJ turned out to be an excellent trainer and very good at motivating me round the course, something that surprised us both. This isn't the end. I'm entering more sportives, and I'm making sure my mates come along with me next time. Mawil's rule!

OJB: I'm seriously impressed and proud of you. You even looked like a cyclist when you got on the drops, eyes fixed against the Manchester weather, and hammered the big ring when we had a nasty headwind.

Saying that, I spent the second 20 kilometres riding in front of you like a domestique — it would have been only a matter of time till you sent me back to the team car for more bidons. Now, I don't want to ever hear the words 'big ring' and 'mother' in the same sentence again. **End**

7 OF THE BEST

Recovery milkshakes

This month we test seven of the best recovery milkshakes available from your high street or local supermarket, as we look to find the perfect blend of convenience and quality

Words Paul Knott

Combining training with everyday life can be difficult enough in itself; add in additional factors such as post-ride nutrition and it can become a chore rather than an escape from your day-to-day routine. Luckily there are ways to make sure nutrition is the least of your worries after a ride. Recovery drinks are now a crucial area of nourishment that every cyclist must think about that can be made using powders and sachets mixed with milk or water.

However, if you want something pre-made

and reliable without the hassle of measuring out tubs of powders or sachets, high street retailers have recovery shakes that are ready to drink as soon as you get back home.

Recovery shakes should be consumed as soon as possible after you finish your ride, as this is when your body is most receptive to absorbing the nutrients it needs to bounce back stronger than before. Recovery shakes should contain a mix of carbohydrates and protein to replenish glycogen stores and repair muscles. This

combination is what sets recovery shakes apart from pure protein-based shakes, with the natural hydration benefits from milk-based products. Recovery shakes shouldn't be consumed instead of meals, rather they should offer a quick fix until you are able to sit down and eat.

Despite the convenience of buying on the high street, be aware that not all shakes are created equal. Some are geared for weight loss, while others encourage muscle growth — so make sure you know what you are buying.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR



Adapt your nutrition

Choosing the correct nutrition strategy and being able to adapt it according to different training sessions is vital. Sometimes more protein will be needed for recovery, whereas at other times carbohydrate replenishment will be the priority.

Less is more

The body can only store a certain amount of glycogen at one time, so drinking copious amounts of recovery drinks won't mean you recover faster or better. However, studies do agree that the body needs 20g of protein to initiate the recovery process.

Timing

When you get in from a ride, thinking about nutrition might be behind putting your feet up and having a shower on your priority list. But it's important to top up your carbohydrate and protein stores as soon as possible.

Upbeat £1.75

Despite being only 250ml, Upbeat manages to get the most out of the joint-smallest bottle on the test. Coming in four different flavours that shun the traditional tastes associated with recovery drinks (strawberry, blueberry and raspberry, mango and passion fruit and chocolate and orange), all contain natural fruit juices. The taste is refreshing and its 20g of protein means it punches above its diminutive size, providing the nutrition required to kick-start recovery.

Refreshing taste that lives up to its name



www.feelingupbeat.com

Ufit High Protein Health Drink Shake £2

Ufit's high-protein nutrition drink comes in chocolate and strawberry flavours, providing 22 grams of protein. However, the taste of the shake is very artificial and extremely sweet compared to the others here. Regrettably, this overshadows the carbohydrate content, which is also less than the other drinks featured here.

Protein benefits eclipsed by overwhelmingly sweet taste



www.theproteininksco.co.uk

Fuel10k Fuel breakfast milkshake £1

Perhaps not as well known compared to the other products on this test, but at 330ml per bottle this certainly packs in the all-important nourishment needed for a recovery shake, with around 40 grams of carbohydrates and 20 grams of protein. Fuel10k's shake may taste a tad artificial but you do have a choice of five flavours with banana, strawberry, coffee latte, vanilla and chocolate.

Crammed full of vital sustenance



www.fuelyour10khours.com

For Goodness Shakes £1.50

Despite its play-on-words name, For Goodness Shakes' recovery drink is far from a joke when it comes to content and taste. Coming in a variety of flavours (chocolate, superberry and vanilla), this recovery shake provides a three-parts carbohydrates to one-part protein ratio. The taste is smooth and this would make a perfect drink after long hours in the saddle.

Delivers on both flavour and nutrition



www.forgoodnessshakes.com

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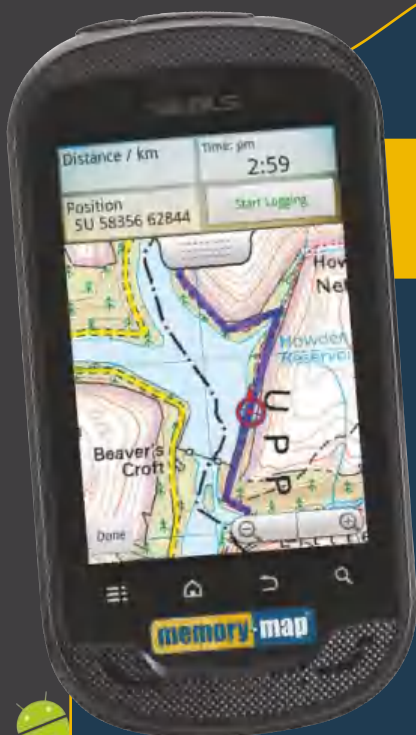
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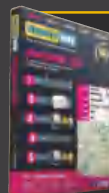
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Complan Milkshake **£1.26**

Complan's milkshake is the joint smallest on the test at just 250ml, which might be why it only provides 22 grams of carbohydrates. Unfortunately, the taste is very sweet and artificial, while also providing a very small amount of protein as well. It comes in strawberry and chocolate flavours but may be suited to complement other recovery shakes rather than be your go-to, post-ride drink.

Conveniently sized but lacks nutritional benefits

6



www.complan.com

Dunn's River Nurishment High Protein Nutritional Milk Drink **£1.99**

If you are looking for a major protein boost after your ride, then this is the drink for you. With a high protein content that lives up to its name, it also delivers a high amount of carbohydrates, meaning it is a great recovery drink if you are primarily focused on content. In spite of this, the flavours are limited to just strawberry and chocolate, which are not the most refreshing, or flavoursome. It comes down to a choice between taste and performance.

Excellent protein and carbohydrate content but basic flavours

8



www.nurishment.co.uk

USN Protein Fuel 25 chocolate high protein shake **£1.83**

The professional packaging may attract many people to buy USN's shake, but it may not be the ideal choice to drink after an endurance ride. Its 27.4 grams of protein is great to repair and build muscles that may have been fatigued from prolonged exercise, but its lower carbohydrate content puts it behind others on the test. The taste cannot be faulted though.

Packed full of protein and tastes great

8



www.usn-sport.com/en

VERDICT

The importance of providing your body with the right nutrients to recover after physical activity cannot be underestimated, and cycling is no different. Because of the time involved on the bike, once you finish your ride, the convenience of high street recovery milkshakes reduces the tedious process of post-ride nutrition.

For Goodness Shakes is this month's winner, providing a good variety of tasty flavours as well as delivering great nutrition content. Perfect if you are in a rush after your ride or just want to top up your glycogen stores again.

Quite a few shakes within this test will do a very good job in replenishing your stores after a long ride; some may also be more useful after certain types of rides and training sessions than others. So give them a try and see which shake suits you best.



Get aero and go faster

Aerodynamics is not something only the pro riders should think about, as getting more aero can help any cyclist go faster, thanks to a few simple adjustments

Words Paul Knott Photos Chris Catchpole

It doesn't matter if you are Sir Bradley Wiggins on the latest release out of the Pinarello factory or a weekend warrior chugging along on an old clunker, we all have one thing that is stopping us going faster — aerodynamic drag. But what is it and how can we reduce its effects?

Many cyclists believe that aerodynamics only matter if you're riding in gale force winds or if you are a professional rider looking for marginal gains. However, it can be just as crucial for a sportive rider on a peaceful summer's day.

A common belief is that the only way to get faster is to increase your cadence or boost your power output, yet there is a simple way to improve your average speed without breaking a sweat. Well maybe not that easy, but not as strenuous as your usual training rides.

The effect of aerodynamic drag increases linearly with the speed that you ride at, so faster riders see greater increases in speed when they ride after aerodynamic training. However, slower cyclists will see a larger amount of time drop off their ride times compared to their speedier counterparts when applying the same principles to their riding technique.

Air resistance will always be the primary reason for slowing you down, but the amount of impact that it has on your speed can be manipulated by how you set up your bike and how you position yourself once you are on it. If you can become more efficient through the air, it will increase your speed without even having to increase your power output.

The main area of aerodynamics that reduces speed is the frontal area of a cyclist; this is the area of a cyclist that can be seen when viewed from front on. The greater the frontal area of a cyclist and their bike, means an increase in aerodynamic drag will occur. This can account for up to 80-90 per cent of your total resistance when on the bike, and only really becomes a lessened resistive force compared to weight when on a climb of over five per cent.

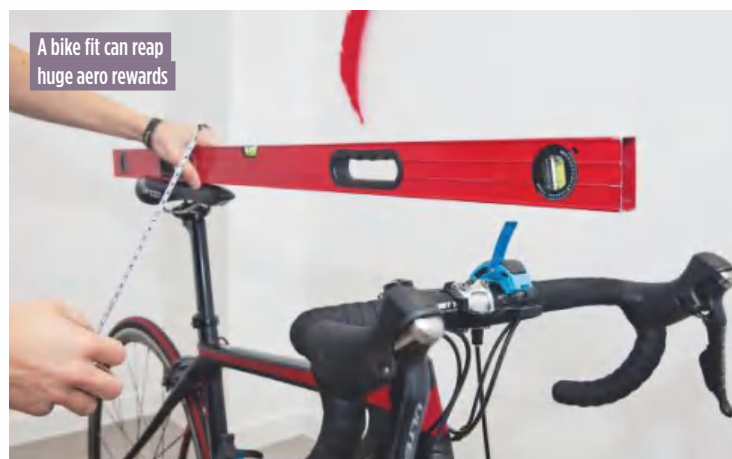
The importance of wind resistance is clear in professional races, as the teams ride in a tight bunch to lessen the effect that wind and drag might have on their lead riders. Professional riders take aerodynamics even more seriously in other aspects of racing, so much so the use of wind tunnels to improve positioning efficiency is now routine throughout all teams. It is commonplace for bike manufacturers

to have wind tunnels at their factories, as well as having computer programs that can replicate wind tunnels to develop the latest aerodynamic technology.

But what about the amateur rider? It wouldn't be time or cost effective to hire out a wind tunnel to tweak your position, especially if you have never thought seriously about aerodynamics before. To become more aero on the bike requires practice out on the road and seeing what benefits you, rather than what may be detrimental to your cycling technique.

Technique

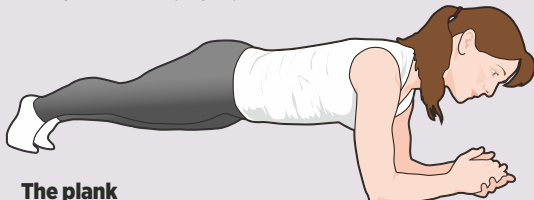
In basic aero terms, the smaller you make yourself on the bike, the less area there is be slowed by wind resistance. Eighty per cent of your aerodynamic drag is made up from your body, with the remaining 20 per cent being made up from your bike. So training the body to adopt





Develop an aero body

Achieving these more aerodynamic positions may mean improving your flexibility and core strength with certain stretches and exercises. Maintaining a strong and flat body position on the bike requires a greater amount of suppleness, core and upper body strength compared to riding in a more upright posture.



The plank

Completing isometric exercises will not only build your core strength, but also replicate the position on the bike that you need to hold when on the drops, or if you are using aero handlebars. The plank is held in a similar position to that of a press-up but with your forearms being the contact point with the ground instead of your hands.

Hold the body in a position so that there is a straight line from your feet up to your head, hence why the exercise is called the plank, as a plank of wood should be able to lie flat on your back. Hold the position for 45 seconds. This can be increased or decreased depending on your ability. Repeat three times.



Stretch those hamstrings

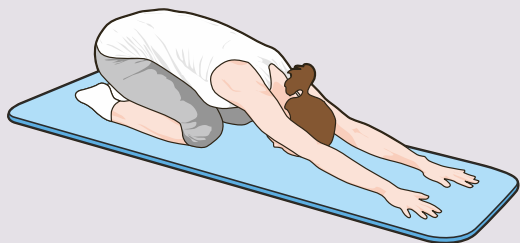
When cycling, your hamstrings are the muscles that are most prone to tightness due to the shortening that occurs during pedalling. Therefore it is crucial that you take it easy when stretching them out if you're attempting to improve your flexibility. To stretch your hamstrings, bend over at the waist and gently ease your arms down towards your toes, maintaining slightly bent knees. Hold for 20 seconds and repeats three times.

Eliminate your lower back issues

One of the most common problems when you step off the bike is the feeling that your spine has curled up like a snake. However, it doesn't have to be this way — a few simple back strengthening and flexibility exercises can help your performance on the bike, as well as how you feel off it.

One of most basic exercises to help reduce your back pain is the prayer position stretch. Lie on your front with your knees bent up against your torso and reach out with both arms, stretching your fingers as far as they can go. Try to keep your bottom stretched back towards your feet and hold for 20-30 seconds. Repeat three times.

While these stretches will specifically help you achieve your most aerodynamic position, maintaining and improving your flexibility throughout your entire body will help you ride faster and feel better on the bike.



Skinsuits are a must have item for time trialists

more aerodynamic positions may not just improve your average speed, but could also save you money that you may have otherwise spent on aerodynamic equipment.

One of the simplest ways to improve your positioning on the bike, which is often ignored as it seems so obvious, is to ride with your hands on the handlebar drops. It may not be done consistently as you get into a rhythm of riding with your hands in the most comfortable position, especially if you are on a slight incline. However, it can reduce your aerodynamic drag by

20 per cent compared to when your hands are positioned on the brake hoods or the handlebar tops.

Whereas most aerodynamic equipment aims to reduce the coefficient of drag of a particular piece of clothing or equipment, purchasing a set of clip-on 'tri-bars' can alter your body position and reduce your frontal surface area. These are mainly used in time trial events to narrow the shoulders and flatten the back, but they do compromise comfort for aerodynamic gain. They also compromise handling and braking, and are banned in mass-start races.

Reducing your frontal area further can also be achieved through shaping other parts of your body. Your elbows should be tucked in as close to your torso where possible. Obviously this may not be ideal if you're putting in a big effort going up a climb, but if you are riding along on flat terrain then your elbows shouldn't be sticking out in the wind like wings.

Shrugging your shoulders and tucking your head down as low as it can go towards your handlebars will place your body in an almost optimal aerodynamic position. These positions may feel awkward at first though, so it might require practice to not just improve your performance but to also make sure you are still in control of your bike and riding safely.



The Hour record demands power and aerodynamics

“Think of wearing a baggy jersey on the bike as the same effect that a parachute has on a skydiver — loose fitting clothes will slow you down”

One of the stereotypical questions that is constantly banded around cycling is ‘why do cyclists shave their legs?’ A number of amateur riders do it just because the professionals do, whereas others do it just because they like how it feels... However, there is now proof that it can improve your performance.

The hair and the tortoise

American bike manufacturer Specialized found that over 40km you could save up to 70 seconds if you take the razor to your leg hairs before you ride. Whether these 70 seconds are enough for you to go hairless for the rest of your cycling life is up to you, but at least you now have a better performance excuse rather than claiming it is easier for your masseur to give you a post ride rub down.

When it comes to equipment and clothing, there is no limit in how much you can spend on improving your aero credentials; however, different items will make greater improvements than others. If you are unable to (or just don’t want to) splash the cash on new equipment or clothing, then

straightforward changes to your current wardrobe can still help.

One of these can be as minimal as wearing tighter fitting clothes. Think of wearing a baggy jersey on the bike as having the same effect as a parachute on a skydiver — loose fitting clothes flap around in the wind, which will increase wind resistance and therefore slow you down. This may not be what you want to hear if you are looking to drop the pounds and were looking to hide any unwanted lumps and bumps under a baggy jersey. However, if speed is your main aim then it is vital to streamline your wardrobe sizes. An unzipped jersey on a hot day can also increase the drag effect compared to a jersey that is fully zipped up in its most streamlined position.

Despite obvious suggestions that aerodynamics can only be achieved with new equipment, your current bike still holds a large amount of aerodynamic potential that you may not even realise. Getting yourself a bike fit for your current steed could uncover issues that once fixed can lead to a better performance out on the



Shaved legs: for drag kings and queens!

road. Simple adjustments to saddle height, cleat positioning, handlebar width and stem length will not only make you ride more comfortably but could also make you faster.

A bike fit will also make sure that you aren’t compromising your power output while looking for aerodynamic gains. For example, lowering your handlebars may well make you more aerodynamic but you may not be able to put out the same power output in that position. However, finding out that your handlebar width is too wide may not only affect your handling but also your aerodynamic drag.

Purchasing different types of equipment can lead to performance increases; one of the items considered to give the greatest effect is the skinsuit. This applies the same method as tight fitting clothes but with the reduced drag coefficient that is evident in standard cycling clothes. Further financial outlays can be made through purchasing aero helmets, wheels, shoe covers and even bikes themselves that reduce your drag coefficient even further.

The aero possibilities are almost endless.

End

Aero and the sportive

Chris Yu is an aerodynamics R&D engineer at Specialized Bicycles. *Cycling Active* asked him about the effect that aerodynamics can have during a sportive:

“A lot of casual riders and sportive riders don’t think aerodynamics are important — they think it only matters for the ProTour level riders.

We all know that sportives start early and it’s a little bit cold, so everyone shows up with a windbreaker on, but as it gets warm you don’t want to stop and drop out of your group even though it’s flapping around. Finally you take it off at a food stop around halfway through your sportive, so we replicated this scenario in a wind tunnel to see what difference that makes.

“It turns out that over just 50 miles (half the distance of most epic sportives) upwards of 10 minutes can be lost by having that windbreaker on. You could have stopped, stretched out, eaten a sandwich, folded it up nicely and put it away and still finished faster than you would have if you kept it on.

“Aerodynamics are vitally important if you are trying to do a personal best or wish to stay in the front group: if you want to go fast, it matters.”

**TIME
TAKEN
20
MIN**

**455
calories**

Prawn, shallot, broccoli and freekeh salad

After a long, strenuous ride, it's important you rebuild your damaged muscle tissue with an adequate intake of protein. Prawns are a fantastic source of protein and are extremely low in fat, making them a perfect post-ride snack. Add freekeh to that, a super-grain which is also high in protein and fibre too, and you've got one heck of a recovery meal.

NUTRITION

SUGAR	FAT	SAT FAT	SALT
7.1g	9.4g	4.1g	1.3g

METHOD

- 1) Soak the freekeh or bulgur wheat in cold water for five minutes, rinse and drain.
- 2) Melt the butter in a large pan, add the shallots and sauté over a medium heat for approximately five minutes until softened.
- 3) Add the freekeh and vegetable stock, then simmer gently for 10-20 minutes; the freekeh needs a little longer than bulgur wheat and has a slightly chewy, nutty texture and taste.
- 4) Add the broccoli, cover and cook for a few minutes, turn the heat off and allow everything to steam under the lid in the residual heat for another five minutes, then leave to cool a little.
- 5) Stir in the prawns, parsley and a good squeeze of lemon juice. Season to taste.

INGREDIENTS

- 150g freekeh or bulgur wheat
- 1 tbsp butter
- 8 shallots, peeled and quartered
- 200ml vegetable stock
- 200g long-stemmed broccoli
- 150g cooked tiger or king prawns
- Handful fresh parsley, roughly chopped
- 1 lemon

Cycling

A C T I V E

**Handcrafted... A very new
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Prevent sore wrists and numb fingers

Sore wrists and numb fingers after a long ride? It could be carpal tunnel syndrome, warns physio and osteopath *Lewis Wood*

Photos: Andy Jones, Mike Prior

While cycling, your hands are under more or less constant pressure. After a gruelling long ride, it's not unusual for your palms to feel sore, owing to the stresses of gripping the handlebars to hang on, steer, and absorb bumps and vibrations. A pair of padded cycling mitts and good-quality bar tape can help. Even so, some cyclists experience persistent numbness, tingling and wrist pain after long rides. If this is combined with slight swelling and reduced strength in your forearms, you may be experiencing nerve irritation or a problem related to poor circulation.

What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is the name for a group of problems that includes swelling, pain, pins and needles, numbness, feeling of burning, and a loss of strength in your wrist and hand. Your wrist is made up of eight small carpal bones that form a narrow groove or tunnel. Nine flexor tendons and the median nerve pass through this carpal tunnel, which is the diameter of your index finger, facilitating sensation in the palm and fingers. If the diameter of this bony tunnel is compromised by thickened forearm tendons, ligament laxity, degeneration or, more commonly, swelling, pressure may be put on the median nerve.

In normal circumstances, the pressure within the carpal tunnel averages around 2.5mmHg (millimetres of mercury), but in patients with carpal tunnel syndrome this pressure rises to above 32mmHg owing to the swelling. During wrist extension, e.g. while holding your handlebars, the pressure in the carpal tunnel can rise to over 110mmHg.

The problem usually manifests in a rider's dominant hand, but nearly half of carpal tunnel syndrome sufferers have symptoms in both hands. Women are three times more likely than men to fall victim to this condition, possibly because their wrist bones are smaller. Factors that increase susceptibility include hormonal changes during pregnancy or menopause in women, and diabetes, hypothyroidism, lupus, obesity and rheumatoid arthritis in men and women.

Treatments for carpal tunnel syndrome

- Wearing a wrist splint during repetitive activities or at night
- Rest — in mild cases and in the early stages
- Short-term use of non-steroidal anti-

inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

- Regular ice applications
- Static wrist stretches
- Forearm and hand massage
- Tender-point release
- Improving the neurodynamic extensibility of the median nerve
- Localised corticosteroid injections
- Carpal tunnel release surgery

Should I stop cycling?

Firstly, check that you have full movement in your wrist joint and are able to fully bend or extend your wrist while your elbow is straight. Secondly, check for any signs of swelling, often visible on the underside of the wrist, by comparing both sides. Apply firm finger pressure into the wrist joint for 10 seconds, then let go; the skin should turn white and then refill with blood — called capillary recoil. If this doesn't happen, the wrist is probably swollen. If the movement range is normal and there is no swelling, you should be OK to continue cycling, but if wrist pain, hand numbness or pins and needles persist, you should consult a medical professional (GP,

physio, osteopath or orthopaedic consultant) to correctly identify the exact cause. If left untreated, carpal tunnel syndrome can lead to a permanent loss of sensation in fingers and ongoing weakness of the thumb, limiting hand dexterity.

Possible causes of wrist and hand numbness

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Thoracic outlet syndrome (compression of nerve in upper spin)
- T4 syndrome (excessive strain on T4 vertebrae)
- Repetitive strain injury (RSI)
- Wrist flexors/extensor muscle strain
- Cervical radiculopathy (neck nerve irritation)
- Cervical disc prolapse
- Peripheral ischemia (restriction in blood supply)
- Reduced peripheral circulation (narrowing of blood vessels)
- Guillain-Barré syndrome (rare neurological disorder)
- Side-effect to a prescribed medication **End**



Addressing hand and wrist pain early could save future grief

If you are experiencing mild or intermittent wrist soreness and hand numbness, these exercises might help — but proceed with caution, as you don't want to overstretch or further irritate a median nerve. Complete pre or post-ride and 24 hours after each ride.

Median nerve neurodynamic gliding

Place your right palm against the wall to your side, with your elbow straight and fingertips facing downwards. First you will feel a stretch in your forearm, biceps and shoulder. Slowly bend your neck towards your left shoulder until you feel a deeper stretch in your right arm. Bring your neck back upright then repeat the neck bend to the opposite shoulder. Proceed slowly, five times. Cease exercise if discomfort persists.



Wrist flexor wall stretch

Place your palm against the wall in front of you, elbow straight, forearm twisted open with fingers facing downwards. To increase the stretch effect, spread your fingers, with your palm higher up the wall. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat five times.



Wrist flexor tender-point release

Bend your elbow and slide your thumb down this skin crease to apply a pressure on the inside of your elbow. Gently work your thumb into the soft tissue just above the bony part of your inner elbow. You're in the right place if, when you make a fist, you feel the wrist flexor tendon (golfer's elbow point) tighten. Apply a constant pressure to this tender point for one minute until the soreness reduces, and repeat two to three times.





CA STAFFER
CHALLENGE

CHALLENGE COMPLETED

Six months after challenging herself to ride the Etape du Tour, *Jocelyn Mack* takes to the start line. How would she fare over the 186km with 4,500m of climbing? Let's find out...

Every July, professional cyclists take part in the world's greatest bike race, the Tour de France. Made up of 21 stages, the race includes sections where the riders do battle in the Alps, a mountain range formed 700m years ago. The Alps as we know them today — with their ancient, epic peaks — have stood, defiantly, for 15 million years.

Mere mortals like you and I get the chance to ride one of the Tour's 21 stages on the l'Etape du Tour, a fully supported, closed road event. Over 15,000 riders from all over the world converge in a sleepy town, somewhere in France, to make like the pros for one day. They do so to ride on the same roads that Chris Froome and Alberto Contador will just days later in their fight for the leader's yellow jersey.

But can you ever truly conquer a mountain? The tough slog to the top that is often more than 15km long and can

take some amateur riders nearly two hours to climb, sees you visiting its peak for only seconds before you descend the other side, to be once more engulfed in its shadow.

The 9,877 finishers of this year's Etape du Tour would probably say that they well and truly conquered the route. But unfortunately I was one of the 5,725 who didn't make the finish line.

Towering challenge

This year's route started from Saint Jean de Maurienne, and it was a brutal course. In fact, it was one of the toughest that the Etape du Tour has taken its participants over. It led riders across five cols, accumulating 4,500m of climbing on a 138km (86-mile) journey. Bearing in mind most UK sportives can only squeeze in around 2,000m of climbing to make them tough, this is one challenge that cannot be taken lightly.

Jocelyn Mack

AGE: 34
WEIGHT: 10st
JOB: Professional dancer and part-time writer for Time Inc's cycling titles
YEARS CYCLING: Two
BIKE: Specialized Ruby Disc
LIVES: South-east London
GOAL: To get fit enough to ride the 142km Etape du Tour this July

Having dedicated this year to training for the event, I might — you would think — be disappointed to not cross the finish line. Of course it would have been great to have done so. But having seen the thousands of cyclists who abandoned before I did (many of whom looked a lot fitter than me) or got swept up by the broomwagon, I actually feel proud that I got so far.

I was swept up halfway up the Col du Mollard, the penultimate climb (at approximately 100km). I soldiered on to the top of the col but it was tough and I resisted the urge to walk the final section. I rolled down the other side to the foot of the final climb, pondering whether or not to carry on. Although I was officially out of the 'race', participants are allowed carry on at their own risk on the open roads and without any back-up.

With over 3,000m of climbing in my

More than 15,000 riders
started the event



Alpine views reward
riders' hard effort



now rather sore legs, I decided that attempting the last 18km climb to the finish would have been foolish. Deep down, I knew I was broken, and everything hurt, and I mean everything — from my neck down to my toes.

With no back-up available to me by that point, I feared I'd be left walking, or worse, left slumped in a heap at the side of the road — ripe picking for the birds of prey that soar on the thermals around the peaks.

Personal battle

Something not working out the way we hoped doesn't mean we have failed. It's yet another lesson, another learning curve on the journey. And falling short takes us closer to discovering the right way to do it.

After all the buzz and chatter at the start line and the cheers and music that erupts as you begin the ride, it is surreal to find yourself climbing in silence. Everyone is consumed by their own personal battle, especially when the top of the climb is never in view. It's head

down, follow the luminous trail of Lycra snaking up in front of you and find your own comfortable rhythm to the top.

However, on the first climb there was definitely an audible 'wow' from the rider in front as we rode a section of road akin to a balcony. The Alps are a truly magical and euphoric place to be, but they are brutal. The pretty snow-capped peaks and lush pine trees that cling to the rock face, almost shimmering under the sun's rays, hide long and challenging gradients that can break even the toughest of riders. Not only do you need to be physically prepared but mentally so too.

"There was an audible 'wow' from the rider in front as we rode a magical section akin to a balcony"

What would I do differently next time?

I will never be the type of person to put my social life on hold or roll out of bed at 5am to train for an event, but there are things that I would do differently.

■ Do harder rides at the weekend. I'd find a route with relentless hills packed into it. Even if you don't have hills near you, find the toughest route you can, even if it's only 20 miles and repeat it over and over.

■ I would work on increasing my cadence when climbing. Maybe if I had given myself longer than six months to train this may have happened naturally.

■ Train on similar terrain. I did go out to Majorca back in April, but if I were to do the Etape again, I would go somewhere the month before the event and spend a long weekend or a week riding up mountains.

■ Try to find accommodation near the start or finish area. I was 20km away and getting to the village to register the day before was a logistical nightmare, as the roads were so busy. Leaving at 5am to get to the start, the day of the ride, is also unpleasant. Take some small lights should you need to do this.

■ If you can't find someone to ride with you, at least take someone along as support. The days leading up to the event can be mentally draining. Travelling is tiring and looking for your hotel is stressful.

■ Get friends to do the event too. The mental challenge is as tough as the physical one. Having encouragement or even suffering together can make you feel better. Had I been riding with someone, perhaps we would've egged each other on to the finish line... or the nearest bar!



The Etape is seriously hard
and commands respect

Unfortunately, in the UK, there is nothing that can truly prepare us. The longest climb of the day was the Col du Glandon over to the Croix de Fer. It is 23km long with no respite, averaging a gradient of seven per cent, rearing up to 10 per cent in the final few kilometres. I ground slowly past many riders on the way to the top; some had opted to walk, while others lay on the side of the road, head in hands, having reluctantly surrendered. The 38°C heat was probably a factor, too.

So am I cautiously advising you against giving the Etape a go? Absolutely not. Until you try the event — with whatever goal in mind — you will never know what it's really like. My training was like feeling around in the dark hoping I'd discover the right way — that magic element.

Did I feel ready when I lined up at the start? Honestly, no. My experience of the event was the biggest and best lesson for me. If we waited until we felt totally ready before every attempt, we would never achieve anything.

Under your nose: touring in the UK

When you've cycled thousands of miles all over the world,
how does one find a new two-wheeled adventure?
The answer, says *Julian Sayerer*, is right under your nose

Photos Chris Catchpole, Roo Fowler



In a line of my book, *Life Cycles*, I endeavoured to justify all of the big and sweeping impressions I'd found for myself while cycling through the US: "you can tell a lot more about a country as a stranger looking around than as a resident with everything right under your nose."

In some ways, before 2014 I was something of a stranger to Britain and its roads — I'd cycled a greater proportion of China or the US than I had my own country, where most of my miles had been accrued either commuting very regular routes in London, or dreaming of the pro peloton while — as a teenager — over and over again I pedalled the same lesser roads of the Midlands. I'd filled out very few of the in-between spaces.

I knew about a literary festival at Hay-on-Wye, but not that the on-Wye part referred to a forest river valley as scenic as the Danube or Mississippi.

I didn't know the Mayor of Nottingham had a (quite sensible) disdain for car congestion in his city and that a levy on workplace parking has subsidised the installation of a popular tram network now replacing many car journeys. I had little idea about Cheshire and the Welsh borders, that industrial cities like Liverpool and Manchester are on the doorstep of pristine countryside. The Wirral was just a name I'd heard, with no idea that in it there exists a passion for cycling that equals any found in the Alps of Savoy or the Basque Pyrenees.

Domestic bliss

As I moved over the Peak District, with Yorkshire villages still in polka-dot from the visit of the Tour de France, and roads decked with messages for Froome, Cav and Wiggins it was a heartening realisation that much of the pessimistic outlook in UK cycle campaigning is misplaced.

Below: Discovering your own country by bike can be just as much of an adventure as an overseas tour

Cycling the UK in autumn 2014, I became aware that the British public actually have a very warm relationships with both bicycles and cycling. The problem is only that this isn't reflected in the design of our road networks or what patience is left intact by a mentality that — perhaps to a greater extent than our Continental neighbours — reflects a world where nothing is prioritised higher than Growth, More and Faster.

So perhaps it is possible to better understand a country, even one that was always right under your nose — you just have to cycle around it at the same 12mph pace that always offered such clear visions of the other countries I've ridden through. ▶▶

"It was a heartening realisation that much of the pessimistic outlook in UK cycle campaigning is misplaced"





Subtle differences

And so, with the book *Life Cycles* released in June 2014, and a bicycle the only honest way to tour a book about bicycling around the world, I packed up my trusty orange Ortliebs (one of which, it transpires, will hold 40 paperback books) and set off into the UK, riding the South Coast, Chilterns, East Anglia, Midlands, up to the Pennines and down the Welsh borders to the West Country. I covered about 1,000 miles across 12 speaking dates, selling and then replenishing my pannier of books as I went. Before setting-out, a US friend had joked: “does your country even have a 1,000 miles in it?” It does, and I tell you... they are good miles.

The fundamental principles of touring the UK are — not surprisingly — similar to those of touring elsewhere, with the decisions you take sometimes born of necessity and sometimes of personal preference. I’ll always choose to camp rather than visiting hotels or bed and breakfasts, the costs of which take the cheap pursuit of touring and

turn it quickly into an expensive one. I also value the freedom in keeping my accommodation over the back wheel, rather than having it as one more thing to dictate speed and route. Having to make it to the next town is a feeling far less pleasant than seeing an agreeable field and deciding to stop. Tools — as heavy items rarely needed — are limited to little more than Allen keys, spoke keys and an entertaining memory of the touring cyclist I once met cursing the fact that he had a chain whip in his bag.

Naturally I always carry puncture equipment, only to find I need no puncture equipment beyond my Schwalbe Marathon Pluses bolstered by additional bands I purchased five years ago in the thorn-riddled state of New Mexico. My standard rule of thumb: that if you have to think twice about whether you need an item, you don’t. I always keeps my packing to a minimum, something I’m only ever grateful for when out on the road. One day I’ll maybe tour with just a credit card in my pocket... but not just yet.

“The skies above the Welsh Borders seem to wake and rain each morning like a man rising with a happy yawn”





Waterproof luggage is an absolute must for touring in the UK

The best holiday ever?

Pack light

Cycle touring involves missing out on some of the comforts of a home. Embrace the minimalism and it's a great way to experience life; whether that is for days, weeks, months or even years.

Don't worry

People have a tendency to think up worst-case scenarios when we propose doing something different. Soon after pedalling out, you'll realise you deal with any problems just the same way you do in normal life — as and when they come up!

Spend on tyres and wheels

The best part of a bicycle to spend money on — tyres because nobody likes fixing punctures, not least when they spoil a perfect moment of rolling through the countryside. Wheels take most of the punishment of a road, and quality spokes and rims will make your life much easier.

Enjoy taking a break from the road

Rhythm is a friend to the touring cyclist, and lots of short stops can get in the way of steady progress but don't be a slave to the idea of arriving at a destination. Stop off at the vineyards, quirky museums, cafes and pubs — it's the in-between parts that really make the experience.

Decent waterproof clothing and luggage

Certainly on a leisurely schedule it's possible to sit-out the rain in a cosy cafe, but sometimes it's not, and sometimes there are five wet miles to ride to make the cafe a reality.

Plan and don't plan

Planning a tour is a part of the adventure, and certainly helps building anticipation. That said, plans by their nature often have to change, and some of the best things that happen when touring are great precisely because they were unplanned and took you by surprise. Remember it's a holiday and don't obsess too much over detail.

Life at the roadside

In other respects, riding the UK gives a rather different experience of touring. As with much of western Europe, it's a hospitable geography with few deserts or vast expanses in which to perish, and while this makes for easier logistics of food and water, for the very same reasons it can prevent the sense of escape that is often such a special part of touring longer distances. South-east England is certainly a pretty corner of the country, but demonstrates the issue of a dense population as you struggle to get away from the ringing sound of big roads.

The same welcoming greenery — looked at from another perspective — of course says something about UK weather. Although I like nothing more

than sleeping under stars and saving myself the pitching and packing of a tent, I generally can't bring myself to take the chance in the UK, and the wonderful sound of rain pattering on a flysheet above was a familiar occurrence in three weeks' riding. Wales held true to its formidably wet reputation, and the skies above the Borders seem to wake and rain each morning with the same regularity a human might rise with a happy yawn. Human memory being what it is, however, and a couple of wet days can stay in the mind more clearly than the weeks that stayed overwhelmingly dry and were often gloriously warm and sunny. A less-good British tradition is perhaps being too quick to make an excuse of the weather.

Tradition is another thing that touring by bicycle brings you right in touch with, for the simple fact that

Main: Is anywhere more beautiful than the UK during the autumn months?
Below left: Getting lost is all part of the fun. No, really...

outside of a car, or flying high and fast above everything by aeroplane, by bicycle you see the world as it exists in passing. My road took me past steam engine rallies, village apple festivals that sold cider and hosted apple cake competitions while an expert identified local speciality apples.

In Buckinghamshire I met a 78-year-old cyclist all in Lycra for his Sunday ride. We talked about the tours we'd done before setting out and covering 10 miles to a nearby tearoom; the two of us, as is so often the case, with so much to talk about that might have gone unsaid without a bicycle in common. As we poured third and then fourth cups of tea, I listened to the man bemoan the state of modern politics before telling stories of his youth; of hitchhiking to Baghdad in the Seventies and being arrested in Montana for stealing a woman's stool in a bar. The bicycle, in Britain or abroad, is reliably a fantastic way to discover the curiosities of a country and its people.

End

Top tip
If you have to think twice about packing something, then it's likely you don't actually need it.



Biking about the bush

Aptly named *Roo Fowler* goes ‘rideabout’ in the Outback, in the Northern Territory of Australia, on a long-distance path starting and finishing in Alice Springs

Words & Photos Roo Fowler

HEADS UP

A morning
amble around
the Australian
Outback

Distance: 32 miles

Big hills: None

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆

Cafe stops: Plenty in Alice



After many years and thousands of miles turning cranks and whirring freewheels, certain rides still stand out in the memory. Sometimes it can be for one particular reason, maybe a particularly tough climb, or it can be for a multitude of reasons that add up to more than their individual worth. You can go for a year without having such a ride, or you can have two in as many days. This is one such ride I'll never forget.

I was taking some time out exploring the cycling scene around Alice Springs, the outback town that sits slap bang in the middle of Australia, an area known as the Red Centre and home to the iconic landmark of Uluru. Around the town, there are miles of cycle paths to help you get about away from the traffic. Some of these routes peel away from the cars, people and city lights, and go their own way, across the undulating desert.

One such path runs from Flynn's Grave — the memorial holding the ashes of Reverend

John Flynn, father of the locally based Royal Flying Doctor Service — to a break in one of the West MacDonnell range's rocky ridges known as Simpsons Gap. Local Ben Gooley, owner of Bicycle Centre Alice Springs, joins me for the ride, and it takes only a few minutes to ride away from the hustle and bustle of the town.


Straight away we have the choice between a wide and quiet tarmac road or a concrete shared-use path. For the moment, we stick to the blacktop and spend a few miles quietly warming up the legs, and not long after we reach Flynn's Grave. This is where we peel off the road and onto the sealed six-foot-wide cycle path that, according to the sign, runs for the next 17km to Simpsons Gap.

I have no idea what to expect; I did a little research and saw the odd photo of this path through the desert, but I assumed it ran alongside a road. It becomes apparent pretty quickly that I was wrong; the road soon passes out of sight and out of earshot. A metal fence

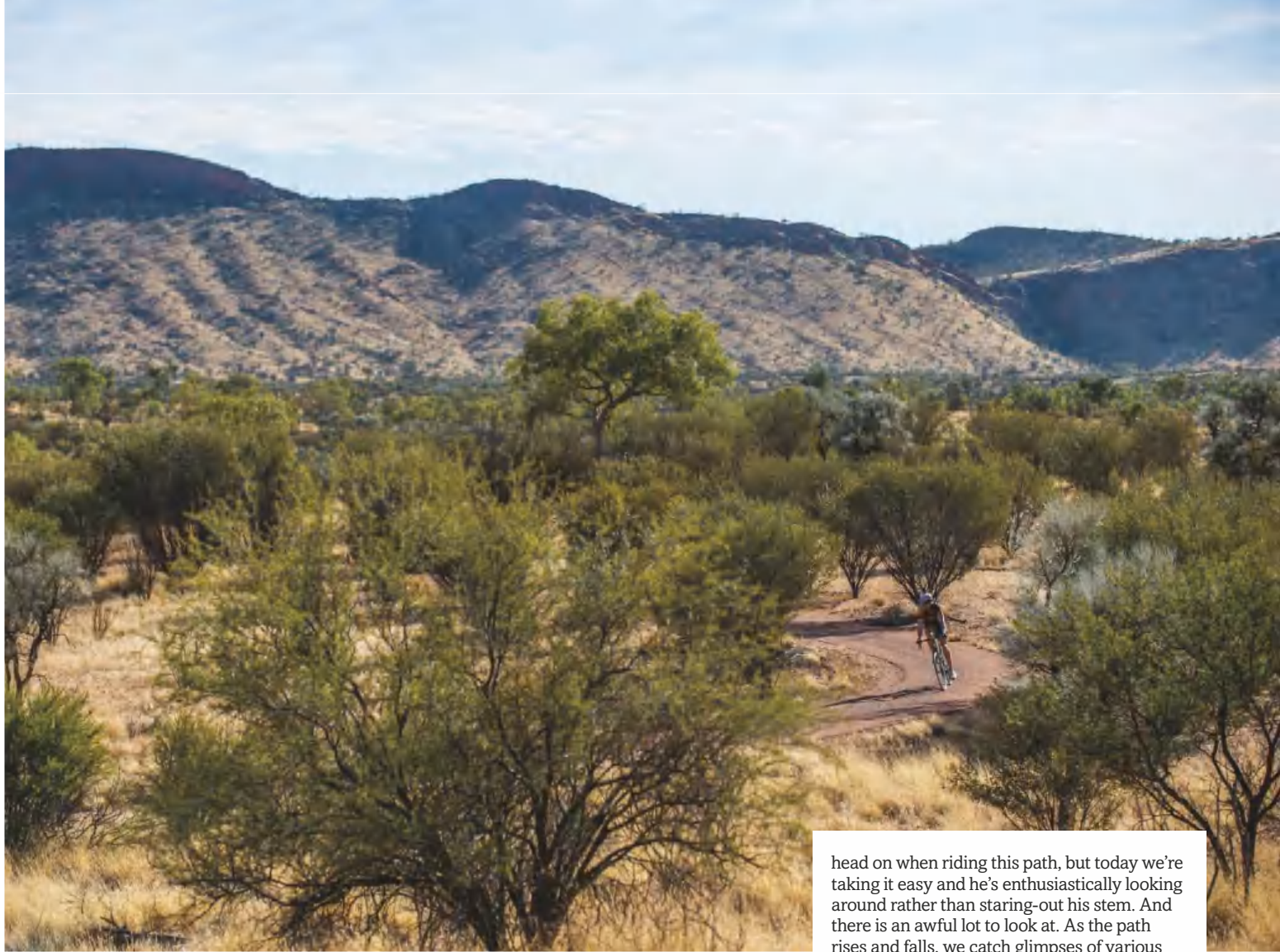
stops motorbikes getting through with a device I dub 'the ankle-stroker': two metal bars run parallel to the ground, about a foot-long gap between them. I'm about to dismount, but Ben expertly threads the eye of the needle and spears through the gap. With pedals level, your feet pass below the bars, and it's just your ankles that harmlessly touch the metal as you pass. I follow suit before drawing alongside to chat to Ben to learn more about the path.

Pasta baked

Apparently, once a year a time trial is held along this path out to Simpsons Gap. It isn't flat and it isn't straight, so it's a time trial requiring not only fitness and power but also skill and judgement. The lack of straights becomes a theme for the path; rarely can we see more than 100m ahead, and I wonder if the designer took his inspiration from the fluid form of cooked spaghetti.

Ben admits he usually has his training 





head on when riding this path, but today we're taking it easy and he's enthusiastically looking around rather than staring-out his stem. And there is an awful lot to look at. As the path rises and falls, we catch glimpses of various ranges of hills and mountains roughly in the direction we're heading. Between us and them is more undulating desert, except 'desert' doesn't quite seem the right word, as there is a surprising amount of vegetation — and I begin to understand why it's known as the bush.

For the moment, the conversation peters out, and the oxygen that went into thought and speech seems to find its way to our legs instead; without announcement, we start to pick up the pace. We ride side-by-side wordlessly, concentrating only on the path, avoiding oncoming cyclists, negotiating corners. It becomes a hypnotic routine: sweep one way, sweep the other, drop a gear and power up the brief rise, enjoy the freewheeling descent and feel the brakes around the next corner, ready for the next verse. It's so simple, but somehow utterly involving.

Fearsome flora

As we lose ourselves in the flow of the path, the baking desert scenery continues to flash past. The path jumps out of character when the blur of tall grasses and gum trees is interrupted by a large green box. We jolt out of our reverie and brake to a halt. It's a water tank kindly placed alongside the path, and we top up from the tap that — according to the warning sign — often dispenses thirsty bees before a stream of fresh water. Onwards, and I can't help but admire the gum trees; there's something fascinating about their immaculate white bark. Standing prone a little further away are the eerie ghost gums, distinguished by their single slender and straight trunk. Ben informs me that the aboriginals believe these dead trees to be the spirits of their deceased. Trees seem to grow wherever there is a chance of water, and sure enough we soon ➡



Left: Keeping an eye out for Kylie's much-fabled 'locomotive'
Top right: Meandering through sun-scorched brushland
Above middle: The trail is exclusive to bicycles
Above: An Aussie arachnid lurks...

STOP!



GETTING THERE:

Alice Springs is a magnet for cyclists; the numerous bike paths, purpose-built mountain bike trails, and even a velodrome help to draw the pedalling crowds. Part of its charm is that it's far from any other large urban area, and realistically flying is the only way to get here. Singapore Airlines (singaporeair.com) flies four times daily from London Heathrow and daily from Manchester International to Singapore and six times a week to Darwin.

BIKE SHOPS:

There are three main bike shops in Alice Springs:
Bicycle Centre Alice Springs
Smith St. Velos
Penny Farthing

FOOD AND DRINK:

There is nothing available on this route other than the many cafes, shops and restaurants in the town centre — so take any food you think you might need. Barbecue stations are provided at Simpsons Gap, as is water.

ACCOMMODATION:

There are numerous hotels available at a range of prices within the town.
Lasseters Hotel (lasseters.com.au) is bike-friendly and a short ride from the centre of town.
 Visit australiasoutback.co.uk for more info.



come across a sandy, dry river, a feature of this area. Apparently you can call yourself a local only once you've seen the main river through the town flow with water on more than one occasion.

After the river crossing, it's not long before we reach the end of the path, get our ankles stroked and find tarmac beneath our wheels once more. Only a minute or two up the road and we reach the car park for Simpsons Gap. It's well worth packing a lunch and a bike lock, as there are barbecue stations provided and water on tap nearby. Lock your bike in one of the provided bike racks, and wander the short distance to the sandy river bed where you can find a pool of cool water sandwiched between two buttresses of rock. This watering hole in the desert attracts all sorts of wildlife, from rock wallabies to any number of small birds darting about the cliffs. It genuinely is a stunning spot, and hard to believe it exists here, having ridden through such a huge bone-dry expanse — 25km or so since leaving the town.

Ben tells me this spot is also the destination on a ride organised by the locals to coincide with the full moon each month. The pleasant night-time temperatures year round are ideal for night riding. Everyone rides out to the gap in the evening, fire up the BBQ while the sun sets, then, after far too much food, they attempt to burn it off, pedalling back along the path with its quartz-heavy surface reflecting the bright moonlight in the crystal clear desert air.

There's no moon for us, just the brilliant, relentless light from the midday sun and accompanying winter heat. We leave the watering hole to the wildlife and get moving towards Alice Springs. Here you can choose to head back via a longer route on roads to bring you into the south of town, or back along the path, the way we came. I glance at my watch; it's only lunchtime, so we go for the spaghetti path. **End**



Top: Where wildlife come to wet their collective whistle
Above: Negotiating trail furniture,

Right: The path allows for a pacy pedal

Far right: Classic Outback scenery





In search of the perfect Cornish pasty

Three MAMILs cycle the length and breadth of Cornwall in search of that most delectable of portable cycling snacks — the Cornish pasty

Words Tom Isitt Photos Tom Isitt, Jorian Murray, John Skok, and VisitCornwall

As pub plans go, this one definitely had merit. A three-day meander around the leafy lanes of Cornwall, exploring one of the country's most beautiful counties and searching out the perfect Cornish pasty.

And who doesn't love a pasty, eh? I'm not talking about one of those things you get at a petrol station, I'm talking about the real deal — a luscious parcel of loveliness designed to fit perfectly into a cycling jersey pocket and fuel a hungry cyclist. Yep, I do love a pasty. And, as it turns out, so do my cycling mates John and Jorian.

And then there's Cornwall — home

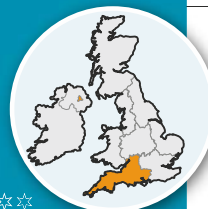
to Jamaica Inn, Doc Martin, Poldark, wreckers and smugglers, surfing, the Eden Project, picturesque fishing villages, high moors, rugged coastline and mysterious Celtic history. And hills. Many, many hills. None of them is terribly long, but they do like a double-digit gradient in Cornwall, and 15 per cent for 500m is not unusual.

So the pub plan turned from beer banter into actual planning. Maps were consulted, online research was conducted, and the Cornish Pasty Association contacted for recommendations. As it turns out, pretty much every Cornish person, and anyone who's ever been to Cornwall,

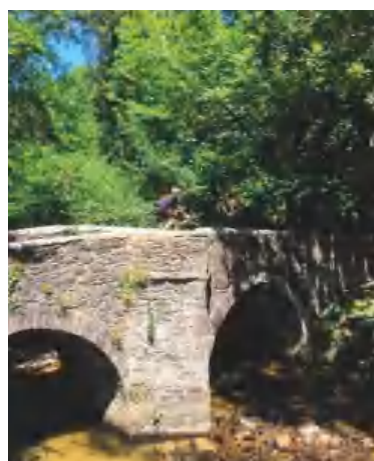
HEADS UP

A three-day tour of Cornwall featuring the charms of the English Riviera and lots of pasty eating

Distance: 192
Big hills: A lot
Challenge: ★★☆☆☆
Cafe stops: Countless



17
pasties

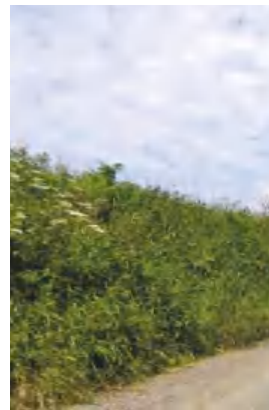


has an opinion about where to find the best pasties. It's a subject that generates a surprising level of passion among the cognoscenti.

With a dozen recommendations from the CPA and assorted others, we turned to our online route-planner of choice (www.ridewithgps.com) and tried to find a way of visiting as many recommended pasty bakeries as possible over a three-day period while riding a circular route to return us to where the car would be parked in Plymouth.

The result was an itinerary of three days of riding around 65 miles per day, with around 5,000ft of climbing per day. Not easy, but not too hard

Clockwise from top: Three MAMILs on a face-filling mission; turning pasties into pedal power; Falmouth's National Maritime Museum; Rowe's gets an early lead with an impressive 9/10; bridge over untroubled waters



either. Our route would take us south-west from Plymouth to Falmouth, along Cornwall's south coast, passing through Looe, Fowey and St Mawes. On the second day we would strike north from Falmouth to St Ives on Cornwall's north coast, before turning north-east along the coast to Newquay. The final day would see us head further north-east to Padstow, before turning east across Bodmin Moor back to Plymouth.

Looking at the elevation profiles, it seems that Cornwall is even more up-and-downy than we thought. No matter, there was nothing over a couple of miles in length and nothing higher than 900ft above sea level. How hard could it be?

Let's eat

Leaving Plymouth via the Devonport to the Torpoint ferry, early one morning in June, we stopped almost immediately for a pasty from Dasher's in Torpoint. Pasties for breakfast isn't part of my usual dietary routine, but in the interests of journalistic research I managed to force one down (it scored a solid 7/10 on our entirely subjective and unscientific Isitt-Murray-Skok Pasty Rating Scale).

At this point I should probably point out that pasties are not really the ideal cycling food. Yes, they're delicious and fit well into a cycling jersey pocket, but they are usually quite high in fat, which isn't great when riding. However, when you're burning in excess of 3,500

"I should probably point out that pasties are not really the ideal cycling food"

calories a day cycling, a couple of pasties aren't going to do much harm.

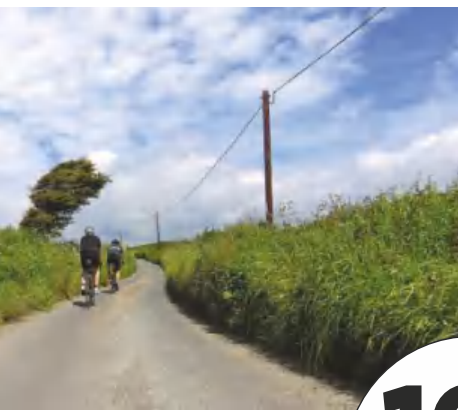
Suitably fortified, we set forth. The route was designed to avoid the main roads as much as possible, which meant we meandered gently through Cornwall's rolling countryside, wooded lanes and open farmland, with almost no traffic to contend with. The downside was that these back roads included an improbable number of short, sharp ascents and descents, crossing numerous steep valleys that run down to the sea.

With Cornwall's hedgerows a riot of colour and scent, there couldn't have been a more beautiful setting for our endless climbing and descending. The sun shone, the birds sang, and curious place names came and went — No Man's Land, Lavalisa Meor, London Apprentice, Polgooth, Bessy Beneath — and by lunchtime we were on the second of three ferries that day (there is something wonderfully romantic and exciting about ferry crossings) from Bodinnick to Fowey.

After a brief lunch in Fowey we continued south-west, skirting St Austell and heading for the St Mawes-to-Falmouth ferry. The roads continued

Clockwise from top left: St Mawes Castle is a legacy of Henry VIII's reign; Warrens Bakery: pasty purveyors since 1860; narrow country lanes are walled in from the wind; St Ives is the essence of Cornish charm; crossing the rugged expanse of Bodmin Moor; Chough Bakery takes a perfect 10; the long road back to Plymouth





**192
miles**

to delight (no traffic, beautiful scenery) and frustrate (rough surfaces and lung-busting climbs) in equal measure. For those of us who do most of our riding in London and the Home Counties, this sense of freedom and release was intoxicating. We grinned, we joked, we revelled in the sheer joy of riding a bike in gloriously deserted countryside and lovely weather.

By late afternoon we were on the ferry to Falmouth, engaged in conversation with an old boy who used to race back in the 1960s.

And that's one of the delights about this kind of trip: total strangers engage you in conversation about your bikes, where you've come from, and where you're going. And in 200 miles over three days we didn't once come across an impatient or careless driver.

Falmouth is a charming place, blessed with an excellent maritime museum and many, many pasty shops. We had a teatime pasty from Rowe's (an excellent 9/10) and checked into the Town House Hotel for the night. Dinner was taken at Rick Stein's restaurant next to the maritime museum, where mountains of excellent crab linguine were consumed. We had ridden 58 miles and climbed nearly 5,000ft, so we felt we'd earned it.

Pasties: the rules

There are pasties, and there are pasties. A proper Cornish pasty has to be made in Cornwall from Cornish ingredients. They must be crimped on one side, and the traditional pasty should contain beef, onion, swede and potato, plus seasoning, in a shortcrust pastry case. Non-traditional fillings include lamb, bacon and eggs, cheese, and all manner of other heretical substances (Heston Blumenthal has probably made one with slugs and gunpowder). They are usually available in three sizes — cocktail (small), medium (big), and large (the size of a rugby ball). Prices tend to range from £1.25 for a cocktail pasty to around £3 for a large one.

And the winner is...

- 1 Chough Bakery**
- 2 Barneclutt's**
- 2 Philps**
- 2 Rowe's**
- 5 Portreath**
- 6 Cornish Corner**
- 7 Dashers**



The quest continues

The second day dawned cloudy but reasonably warm, and we were on the road by 9am, managing to find the only four miles of flat tarmac anywhere in Cornwall. We formed a chaingang and upped the average speed significantly. At Hayle, on the north coast, just short of St Ives, we stopped at Philps for the first pasty of the day. It was fantastic (a very creditable 9/10). Although slightly out of our way, St Ives is definitely a must-visit. Absurdly beautiful, it is blessed with a Tate gallery, the wonderful Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden, a quaint harbour, and more pasty shops.

Turning north-west we headed along the coast road for Newquay, our stop for the night. This coast is breathtakingly beautiful, with its steep cliffs, long sandy beaches, gorgeous blue sea and abandoned tin mines. Yep, this is Poldark country as well as being a Mecca for surfers. But on a bike it is a tough ride, with nearly a dozen short but challenging climbs along the way. However, the views from this astonishing road are fantastic, and whatever pain you suffer on the climbs, you are always rewarded with spectacular vistas and lungfuls of fresh sea air. This coast is very different to the south coast, which is more gentle and less windswept.

There was a brief stop at Portreath for a look at the surfers and a mid-afternoon pasty from the Portreath Bakery (8/10, very good effort)

Eat, Sleep, Ride, Repeat.

It's good to get away and see somewhere new. And when you've finished a long ride, exploring new places, it's good to have a little bit of comfort; a cold drink, a hot drink, a microwave, gas hobs, running water, a sofa, double beds with mattresses. The things we take for granted in our own homes. The 6-berth OPUS Camper Trailer can offer you all of those comforts, plus a whole lot more, including the ability to carry up to 6 cycles on it's roof. OPUS takes care of the simple things, leaving you more time to concentrate on your routes.

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before pressing on. Interestingly, the worst climb of the day came right at the end — Gannel Road, the dual carriageway that takes you up towards Fistril Beach in Newquay. After 4,700ft of climbing in 65 miles, the last thing we needed was that horrible slog at the end. The reward, however, was a very good dinner at the Stable on Fistril Beach and a comfortable bed for the night at John's place nearby.

Aching and baking

I have to admit that, after 120 miles and almost 10,000ft of climbing in two days, I was aching a little as we set out from Newquay on day three of the Perfect Pasty Tour. And I wasn't the only one, although I didn't have the heart to remind my fellow travellers that this was going to be the hardest day of the three, with 68 miles and nearly 6,000ft of climbing before arriving back in Plymouth.

But the day was a glorious one, with clear blue skies and a gentle south-westerly helping us on our way north-east along the coast road. Half a dozen tough little climbs (Watergate Bay and Mawgan Porth to name two) brought us to Cornish Corner in St Merryn for our first of three pasties that day (8/10, very decent effort). By now a whole pasty each was simply too much, so we began sharing. Yes, call us lightweights if you must. On approaching Padstow, I missed the

photo-opportunity of the trip by failing to get a photo of a Chough Bakery van driving up Jorian's chuff on the narrow, twisty roads.

In Padstow we went straight to the Chough Bakery for a pasty, and what a pasty it was! The perfect combination of beef, vegetables and gravy, in a delightfully light pastry case. Peppery, but not too peppery, and a fabulous texture, it was a clear leader — 10/10. It would have to be an exceptional pasty to knock this one off its perch. Resisting the temptation to buy several more, we pressed on east towards Bodmin. After Wadebridge we had to endure five miles of the rolling A389, but it was wide and well surfaced and not as busy as we had feared.

And so to our last pasty stop, at Barnecliff in Bodmin. Another fantastic effort (9/10), but not quite as good as Chough's. Very close, though, and the ladies behind the counter were a delight. With our bellies full and our duty done, all that remained was a charming meander along the lanes that skirt the southern side of Bodmin Moor. There were one or two short, steep climbs, but by now we were getting used to them. With more sheep on the roads than cars, and almost perfect cycling weather, the next 20 miles were magical. With the high moor to the north, sweeping views to the south, lush green countryside as far as the eye could see, and

A trio of tourers

Three MAMILs, three very different bikes:

Carbon: John was riding his carbon-framed Trek Domane 6.0 with Ultegra Di2, a bike with endurance geometry (high stack and short reach) built for long distances and comfort. With its tall head tube and IsoSpeed damping features, the Trek is designed for all-day comfort, an important consideration while cycling on Cornwall's unforgiving road surfaces.

Steel: Jorian was riding his Condor Super Acciaio Ultegra, a bike he has dreamed about ever since he used to press his nose against the window of Condor as a schoolboy back in the 1970s. It's a modern take on a classic steel bike, with all the elegance and style you would expect, as well as being lighter than you might think (just over 8kg).

Titanium: Tom was riding his titanium-framed Spin Spitfire MkIII, running 11-speed Campagnolo Chorus and handbuilt wheels from Strada (Archetype rims on Chris King R45 hubs). It's a bike which he has ridden up Alpe d'Huez, Stelvio, Tourmalet, Aubisque, Peyresourde and across the cobbles of Roubaix and Flanders. At 7.4kg it's light, fast and comfortable, and has served him well for the last four years.



Above left: Padstow's home to Rick Stein and, more importantly, the perfect pasty
Below: Watergate Bay's wild, windy coastline

hedgerows bursting with wild flowers, this is what cycling in the UK should be about.

It was late afternoon by the time we arrived back at Torpoint for the ferry to Plymouth. Hot and tired, all three of us felt elated and buzzing. Between the three of us we've ridden significant parts of the Alps, the Pyrenees, Majorca, the Côte d'Azur and the Low Countries but all of us agreed that this funny little corner of old-world England is really something special. **End**



Crossing the cosy Cotswolds

The idyllic countryside and charming villages of the Cotswolds make for perfect pedalling

Words Wendy Johnson **Photos** Roo Fowler



Few rides offer such a quintessentially English experience as the Cotswold Line, a cycle route across the northern end of one of our most well-loved Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. I'm tackling the 43-mile section between the villages of Long Hanborough and Honeybourne on a ride that dips into three different counties — Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire — and harks back to a simpler, more elegant era of wisteria-covered cottages, thatched country inns and rolling meadowlands. In fact, the only thing that isn't typically English on this ride is the warm, summery sunshine that makes an appearance as I ride.

I leave the train station in Long Hanborough at the route's start and

immediately pick up signs for Route 442 of the National Cycle Network, heading west on the shared path that runs alongside the main road through the village. Within minutes of setting out I seek out the little Cycle Shop and General Store set back off the road. This legendary place has been mending bikes since the 1960s, so it's worth calling in to see Tony for a bit of bike chat and to pick up spares or supplies.

A mile or so later the main road is left behind and the ride really begins. Undulating country lanes lead me into picture-perfect Cotswolds countryside among plump hedgerows, grassy verges full of tall cow parsley and mustard-yellow fields of flowering oilseed rape. The lanes are largely empty today and I pick up a nice pace on a lovely half-mile



descent towards Fawler with just the occasional passing car or pony trekker for company. Soon the Cornbury Park Estate appears, where the route leaves the road to follow a trail into the trees and I catch glimpses of deer creeping through the thick undergrowth.

Classic Cotswolds

Popping out from the trees and exiting the estate I'm led over the River

Above: Setting a two-wheeled course through an undulating sea of green

Evenlode on a big stone bridge to the town of Charlbury. This is classic Cotswolds and has buildings of honey-coloured stone lining the streets with three country inns tucked among them. I'm told the traditional Rose and Crown is the pub of choice for real ale enthusiasts, but with around 35 miles of riding ahead of me a pub stop is out of the question, so I press

43 miles

HEADS UP

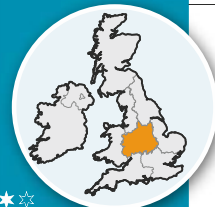
Rolling Cotswolds scenery studded with charming towns and villages throughout

Distance: 43 miles

Big hills: 3

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆

Cafe stops: plenty



on to tackle the first real climb of the day instead. It's just steep enough to get me standing out of my saddle, pausing occasionally to rest and enjoy long views back across the valley.

At around the 14-mile mark I reach Chadlington village, a good place to pause as I've heard great things about Cafe de la Post, a renowned haunt for cyclists. Like many country cafes it's also a one-stop shop for the local community, so any riders feeling the need to drop off their dry cleaning, play the lottery, do a grocery shop or choose an item from the 'secret drawers' won't be disappointed. I'm faced with another ascent soon after leaving the cafe and I regret not sampling its self-proclaimed 'world's best carrot cake', which would doubtless have given me an energy boost. However, respite is on its way and the route soon takes a swooping descent through Sarsden then settles into a stretch of less demanding riding.

Champion village

All of the chocolate box villages that feature along this ride have a certain Cotswoldy charm, but it's while pedalling this easier stretch that I enter Kingham, a desirable spot once named England's Favourite Village. It's

immediately obvious what the judges saw in this place. The pretty church, thatched cottages, village green and snug inns are all impressive, but it's the relaxed country pace of life and geniality of the locals that really appeal to me. Perching on a wall to peruse my map and watch local life go by I even come face to face with the next generation of cycle tourists as 20 or more pupils from the local primary school come wobbling earnestly towards me, practising their signalling and right-hand turns against the traffic. Blessed with this kind of pleasing country riding on their doorstep I'm

STOP!

PUBS & CAFES

Charlbury deli and cafe, 39 Sheep Street, Charlbury, OX7 3RR, 01608 811157.

Cafe de la Post, Horseshoe Lane, Chadlington, Oxfordshire, OX7 3BL, 01608 676461.

The Tite Inn, Chadlington, Mill End, Chadlington, Oxfordshire, OX7 3NY, 01608 676 910.

Daylesford Organic farmshop and cafe, Daylesford near Kingham, Gloucestershire, GL56 0YG, 01608 731 700.

The Bakers Arms, Broad Campden, Gloucestershire, GL55 6UR, 01386 840515.

BIKE SHOPS

Cycle Shop and General Stores, 71a Main Road, Long Hanborough, Oxfordshire OX29 8JX, 01993 881020. Open Mon, Tue, Thu and Fri from 9am to 5.30pm and Sat 9am to 4pm (closes for lunch from 1pm to 2pm).

in no doubt they'll soon be coasting along with ease and gliding past me with youthful energy up the hills.

On the other side of Kingham the route takes me directly to the gates of Daylesford Organic Farm and Cafe. This is more or less the halfway point of the ride and is a great place to stop for lunch and a poke around. Daylesford's produce can be found in the food aisles of Selfridges in London's West End and trendy Notting Hill, so it's nice to be at the business end of the operation and see where it's all made. A market garden, dairy, creamery and bakery can



all be found here, and the animals graze contentedly around the farm's organic pastures. In fact, on leaving Daylesford I get closer than expected to the local livestock as the route guides me across the fields and the dozing sheep are forced to heave themselves off the track and let me through.

Tourist honeypots

I emerge from the fields in pretty Adlestrop, a tiny village made famous in poetry by Edward Thomas, then busy myself with the steady five-mile stretch to Moreton-in-Marsh, a bigger town with a busy, bustling feel compared to some of the sleepier spots I've discovered so far. Flags hang gaily from the buildings along the main street and visitors are spilling in and out of the handmade fudge shops, tearooms and toy shops, giving it a real holiday feel.

Above: Cotswold villages are a poem in stone and slate

Below: Taking wing in the heart of the English countryside

"Chipping Campden is one of the route's most beautiful little towns and is a great place to explore"

Beyond Moreton and past the edges of the beautiful Batsford Arboretum I climb sharply again, but gaining this extra height means some of the most expansive scenery of the ride is revealed, which makes a stunning backdrop as I head to Aston Magna along the rolling contours of the lanes.

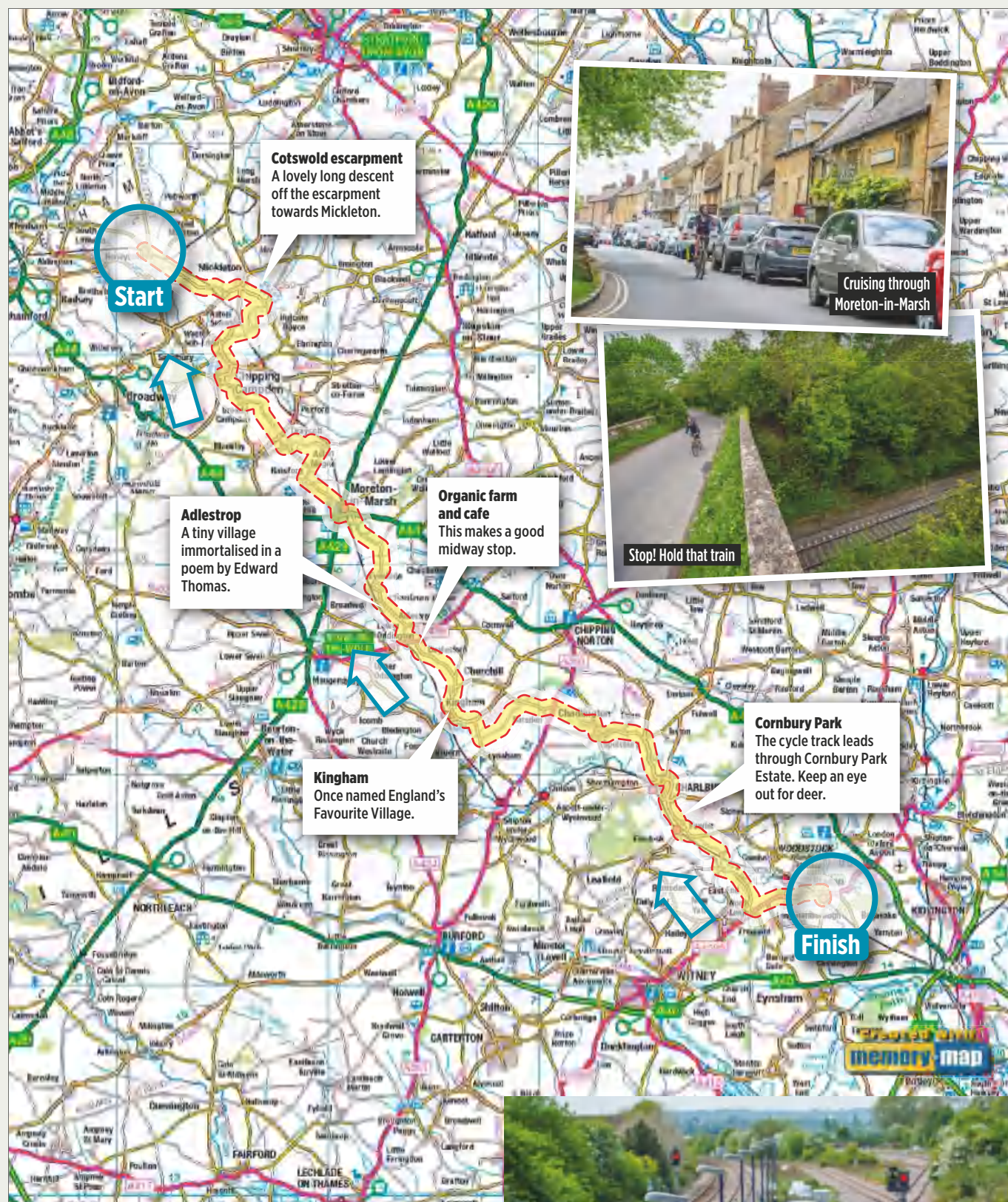
The Campdens come next. Broad Campden charms with its lovingly tended gardens and the popular Bakers Arms pub, while bigger brother Chipping Campden appears a minute or so later. This is one of the most beautiful little honeypot towns along the route and is a great place to explore. It also marks the northern end of the 102-mile Cotswold Way footpath, a National Trail that leads all the way to Bath.

Leaving Chipping Campden behind I have a satisfying sense that the end is near and the serious climbs are all behind me. Better still, I'm about to discover one of the best bits of the ride; a glorious long descent off the Cotswold escarpment with Gloucestershire and Worcestershire stretching out around me. This is a thoroughly exhilarating experience and gives me the impetus I need to complete the final gentle miles to my endpoint at Honeybourne.

Happily, my timing is good and the hourly train that will take me homeward pulls into Honeybourne station just moments after I arrive. "Beautiful day for cycling," says the cheery conductor who, it emerges as we chat, has come back to live in England after growing up in Canada. "I've really come to love the English summer since I got back here," he continues with his dry Canadian wit. "In fact, it's always my favourite day of the year."

He has a point. A rarity they may be but English summer days are made for classic Cotswolds rides like this. **End**





ROAD BOOK

This route can be tackled in either direction but riding from Long Hanborough to Honeybourne allows a lovely long descent off Cotswold escarpment near the end. It is largely on-road with three short off-road sections (note, the track through Cornbury Park Estate is

closed in winter when the B-road must be used with care instead). Start at Hanborough station and follow National Cycle Network route 442 all the way. Sustrans' Warwickshire and the South Midlands map shows the route at www.sustrans.org.uk/shop. There are train stations at either end and several along the way.



Dam fine ride

The Elan Valley in mid-Wales offers some of the best scenery and riding in the UK, as *Steve Thomas* finds out on this short, circular ride

Words & photos Steve Thomas

They affectionately call the Elan Valley the 'Welsh Lake District', and it's not hard to see why. A series of five major man-made reservoirs and their dams line many of the valley bottoms in this wild and wonderful area of mid-Wales, which give it a similar yet far more condensed and more gently rolling appearance to that of the more famous region of Cumbria.

As far as its cycling goes, the region very much carved out its name and repute in the early days of mountain biking, when fat-tire weekend warriors would flock here from all over the UK and even beyond to thunder around its open moorland and forest trails. In

recent years, the trend has switched towards the not-too-distant, hand-carved trail centres of Wales, which have bitten deep into the free spirit of this alluring old-school, cool riding area.

Road riding has always been here and waiting, but so few choose to make the journey and effort to get here, which means they miss out on some of the most scenic and open riding in the country. Naturally this also means that not too many other tourists are lured to these skinny mountain roads; traffic volume is low once you get off the main strips — just perfect.

Knowing where to start when planning a road ride here isn't difficult — there is one fairly obvious gem of a



HEADS UP

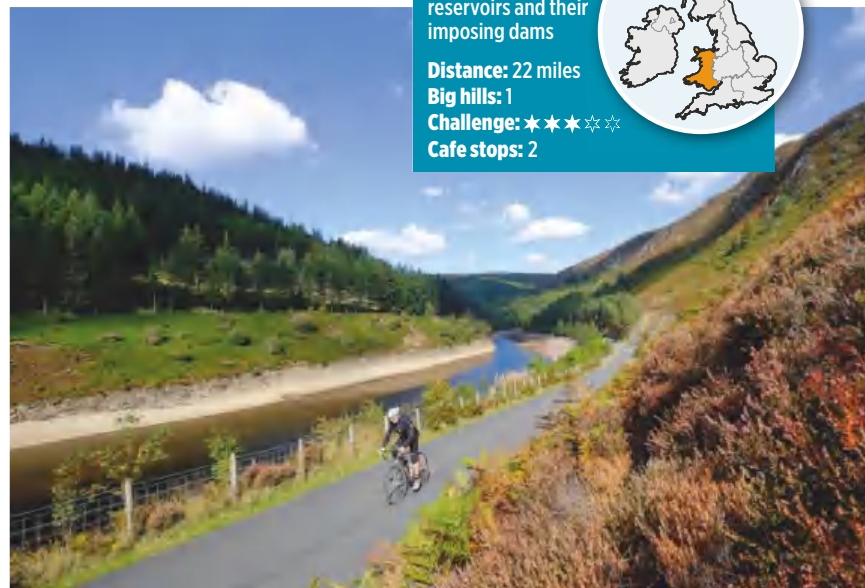
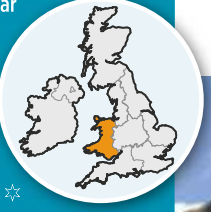
A short yet spectacular ride in mid-Wales, taking in two reservoirs and their imposing dams

Distance: 22 miles

Big hills: 1

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆

Cafe stops: 2



**22
miles**

ride jumping off the map page and begging to be ridden. This is the classic 22-mile dams loop, an action-packed and eye-watering thriller of a ride. There can't be many rides this short in which you get to see so much amazing countryside. There really is not even a nanosecond of dullness on this bright and breezy blinder of a ride.

Running into luck

Thick mist and a nipping chill were with me on the journey over to Rhayader for the ride. It was autumn, and I figured that I'd just about run out of luck as far as the weather was concerned. But, as I reached the outskirts of town, this crisp veil slowly but surely lifted to reveal

clear blue skies above and a kaleidoscope of bright autumnal colours. It was a day just made for riding.

As soon as you leave the 'village limits', the road heads straight in towards the Elan Valley itself. For the first few miles, you don't really get an intro as to what the ride is all about; that starts when you pass the visitor centre.

Climbing up towards the first of the dams and things slowly start to open up. The sides of the valley become steep and craggy on one side, while the far side appears densely forested. As you top the dam, the road flattens out and the vista pops up straight in the eye.

It's as if the spotlights have just been turned on and the star performer bursts

Top: Autumn colours delight alongside the Carreg Ddu reservoir


Above: Club riders distract themselves from their training labours with the stunning view

Above left: The grand dam between Craig Goch and Penygarreg reservoirs

Left: The sun breaks through and gracefully begins to take the chill out of the autumnal air

out in front of you. Drama, pure semi-natural beauty is all laid out before you, and you're right up there in the gallery boxes and riding through the set. When I say 'semi-natural', what I mean is that these are man-made reservoirs, although this does little to detract from their star performance.

Four of the dams were built just over a century ago, while the fifth was not opened until 1952. Their purpose was to supply water to the booming industrial zones of the West Midlands, although they became better known as the testing ground for Barnes Wallis's famous 'dam-buster' bouncing bomb, which breached the Ruhr Valley during the Second World War. These days, the area is still used as a training ground for RAF pilots, and also for SAS forces.

For the whole midrift section of this ride, you'll have the dams and reservoirs riding shotgun. Throughout the year the colours along the way change considerably; any time is a good time to be here. The waters along the way also rise and fall and, during drier times, 



STOP!



PUBS & GRUB

Rhayader has a huge selection of pubs, cafes, small shops and takeaway eateries, so you certainly aren't short of options.

Ty Morgan's, East Street, Rhayader, LD6 5HD; 01597 810564
Long serving cyclist's favourite cafe, bistro, bar & B&B.

Opens daily, hours seasonal — check the website for details.
www.tymorgans.com

Penbont House, Elan Valley, LD6 5HS; 01597 811515

Just up from the bridge and half way around the ride. Award-winning Welsh teas served from 11am-5pm from 1st March — October 30.

Elan Valley Visitor Centre, Elan Valley, LD6 5HP; 01597 810899

Open from 10am-4.30pm daily; can alter during winter. Mountain bike hire, parking and shop also on site.
www.elanvalley.org

BIKE SHOPS

Elan Cyclery, West Street, Rhayader, LD6 5AB; 01597 811343

www.clivepowell-mtb.co.uk
Open daily from 9am-5.30pm.
Great little shop with decent stock, maps, repair facilities and bike hire.

the remains of what lay beneath reveal themselves, which is quite eerie.

Towards the old bridge at Penbont, the road rolls and rumbles some, just enough to force you out of the saddle. As you head into a wooded section so the valley narrows, and a rocky and narrow gorge appears to your left. This is a great spot to stop off for tea and a few pics. The Penbont House tearoom is just over the bridge, and serves great cream teas and sweet Welsh delicacies.

Fairytale scenes

From here a short climb winds out of the trees and on to high-lying and open pastureland. Ahead, you can see the water towers at either dam end of the Penygarn reservoir, which are almost fairytale-like in appearance. This is probably the best view of the whole ride, which is saying something.

Things sharpen up some at this point, and the riding takes on a whole new and rugged flavour. The wide-open and gently rolling road weaves and rolls its way through the valley, flanked by rolling hills and moorland on either side.

The physical pleasures are over. At the head of the valley, a steep and vicious serpentine climb rears up before you. It's short and very sharp. Hairpins stretch out and ease the gradient, but soon enough you reach the junction with the old mountain road.

Grappling at the side of the valley, this narrow hard grey strip of tarmac scrambles out of the valley. It's long and grinding, and is often lashed by



funnelled winds, which make the task even tougher than it should be.

Luckily, it was blue skies and wind-free for me, but it was still challenging enough and worthy of a few extra gears. The views ahead are barren and daunting, but take a look behind and you'll see a long valley, with the Afon Elan river twisting its way through it. This is a very contrasting scene to the dams, and one that adds to the variation of treats along this ride.

Cresting the climb, you're just a few rungs short of 500m above sea level, with a commanding outlook across the local hills. Between the heather-topped clumps to your left, you can see the distant wind farms, an even more modern addition to the skyline.

From here on in, it's all downhill. What goes up must come down, and a long and fast descent finishes up this 'big little' ride in fine style.

End

Top: The scenery along the Carreg Ddu reservoir more than justifies the journey
Above: Riding along the dam between Carreg Ddu and Caban-coch reservoirs



Twisty climb
Hairpin bends and a steep climb up towards the old mountain road, a testing grind with a superb backdrop.

Great views along this stretch
The Elan Valley Trail also runs parallel to the road, and makes for a nice dirt trail alternative option to the road. There is often an ice cream van parked along here too.

Rhayader
An historic market town with lots of cafes and pubs, and the perfect start point for the ride.

Penbont
A scenic gorge and also a nice little tearoom. Great mid-ride stop-off point.

The short, bracing climb above Penygarneg

ROAD BOOK

Starting from the clock tower in the centre of town, head south-west along the B4518. After passing the visitor centre, this becomes a minor road and climbs up a short way, and then follows the edge of the reservoirs for a few miles before winding

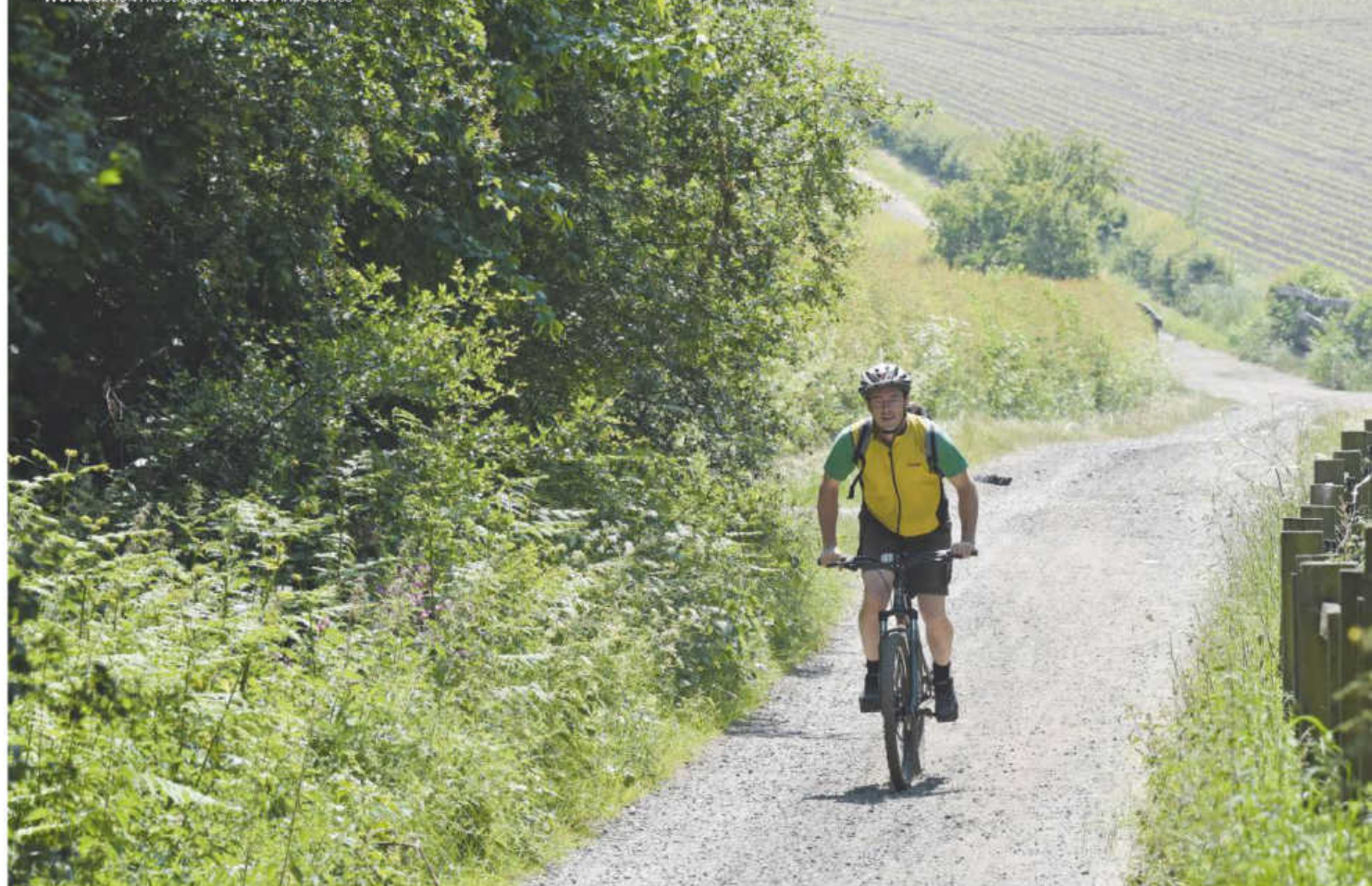
over a section of open moorland. After the road drops down into the valley, you ride across the bridge and then climb up through a pair of steep hairpin bends to a T-junction with the old mountain road. Turn right and climb over the moors, and then descend back down to the T-junction with the B4518, where you turn left to retrace to the start.



Tied up in Notts

Sustrans' National Cycle Network reveals another world beneath your wheels, and all just a stone's throw from Sherwood Forest

Words Simon Hursthouse Photos Andy Jones



UK charity Sustrans National Cycle Network celebrated its 20th anniversary this year and reports that the network now comes to within two miles of 75 per cent of the UK's population, with a third of it being traffic-free. Sure enough, while visiting family in North Nottinghamshire I found Route 6, which runs from London to Cumbria, practically on the doorstep. It was high time I checked it out, so one sunny morning I did just that.

I would explore the Dukeries, once the seat of the neighbouring dukedoms of Kingston, Newcastle, Norfolk and Portland, covering 88,000 acres of North Nottinghamshire countryside. Today, the Ducal Estates are called Clumber Park, Thoresby Hall, Worksop Manor and the Welbeck Estate. But first I reach Vicar Pond, created in the 1870s when Welbeck's Fifth Duke of

Portland had Warmebrooke stream dammed and stocked it with trout.

The route is well signposted and this section has so many information boards there's barely time to ride. While getting my head around one display, which throws me with the word 'eddis', I become distracted by a strange noise coming from across a field. It can only be a slaughterhouse going full pelt, a sound so much like pigs on a waltzer that I can hardly believe my ears. But for the din I would have read more about the medieval ruins of King John's Palace, next door to the abattoir and about the size of a bouncy castle. Instead, I pass the Dog and Duck, cross the road and head for the trees near the River Maun.

Gothic folly

Before sprinklers, Dukeries fields were periodically flooded to invigorate

"Legend has it the Fifth Duke kept one room lined with cupboards, each containing a box that held a wig"

growth. These water meadows, the next board relates, were implemented by the Fourth Duke of Portland, who left another mark nearby on Route 6 in the shape of Archway House. This Gothic folly was built to prove the suitability of the local limestone for rebuilding the Houses of Parliament, after they burnt down in 1835. It was the first of a series of gatehouses planned for a 25-mile private bridleway between Welbeck and Nottingham. However, new railways supplanted the idea and the stone was only used here and in Westminster's foundations.

The trail shortly reaches a main

HEADS UP

Gentle, three-hour ride weaves its way through mainly off-road routes

Distance: 29 miles

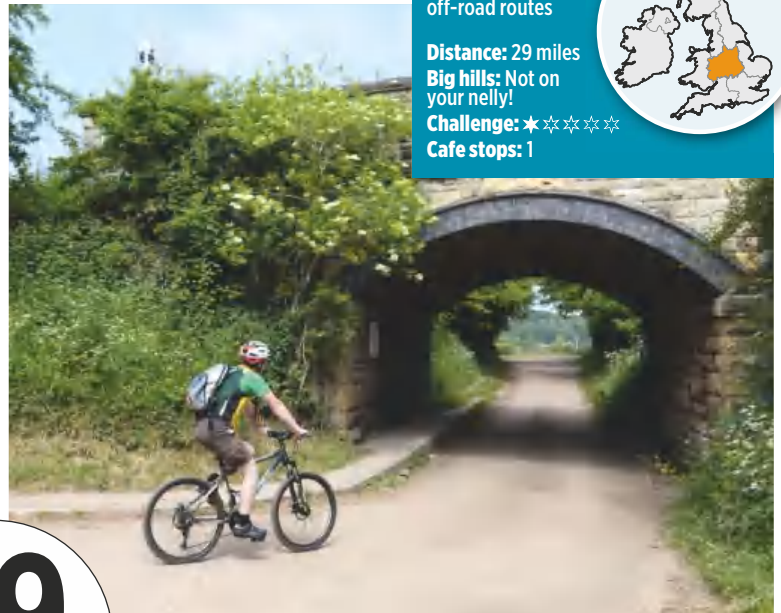
Big hills: Not on your nelly!

Challenge: ★☆☆☆☆

Cafe stops: 1



29 miles



Hazel Gap Farm and check the signposts against my scrawled map. Route 6 veers right here, towards Clumber Park and on into Worksop. Fortunately, an elderly gent walking his dog points me in the direction of Welbeck, where I know of an excellent cafe. "By this field here," he says, pointing to a few sheep grazing the acres before us. "This'll be a solar farm soon," he adds in disbelief, "covered in panels!"

"South-facing," I chip in, "excellent aspect." He's not impressed. "Sheep do look nicer though," I agree, and get on my way.

Pique fitness

I roll deeper into the Dukeries on the byway suggested, towards Welbeck Estate, which now utilises some of its land for renewables in a nod to that Holy Grail, the sustainable future. But Welbeck also has a fascinating past, and the Fifth Duke of Portland, William John Cavendish Scott Bentinck (1800-1879) in particular piques a lot of people's interest. William was the second of nine children born into a family in which all of the male members were called William. A keen horseman and hunter, when he inherited the estate from his father he retreated from public affairs to start tunnelling around these 15,000 acres and beneath his home, Welbeck Abbey.

He certainly left a footprint, employing thousands to lace his land with underground rides big enough for his horse and carriage, reshaping Welbeck from the ground up.

I'd been drawn in by the local anecdotes too. But who wouldn't? Legend has it the Fifth Duke occupied only a few of Welbeck Abbey's rooms, all painted pink with a 'convenience' in the corner; that he communicated chiefly in writing, had his meals delivered by mahogany dumbwaiters and, more colourfully yet, kept one

room lined with cupboards to the ceiling, each containing a green box that held a dark-brown wig. Author Bill Bryson trespassed here in his enthusiasm for this earlier Bill. I pedal on, hoping I don't go quite that far.

From Hazel Gap I near one of the estate's old lodges, with more further on in the hamlet of Norton. These handsome dressed-stone properties, built to house Welbeck workers, still speak of an earlier age. "I could almost be back in the 1800s," I fancy, until a parked speedboat, Wet Dream, brings me to my senses.

One road from Norton leads towards the old Welbeck Village (population: one per square mile) where the white deer park abuts the road. However, this stretch is part of the Robin Hood Way, a long-distance footpath from Nottingham, so cyclists draw the short straw and must keep on Infield Lane to meet the nearby A60, where it's right for almost a mile before turning into Welbeck Estate at the Dukeries garden centre. Fortunately today there's little traffic in sight, but I do spot two grey herons, a black pheasant and in the far distance those exquisite white deer, which is worth the ride in itself.

Turning into the garden centre car park, I recognise from the finalised buildings ahead that I'm minutes from some of the finest cakes in the county at the Harley Cafe.

What lies beneath?

Any cyclist visiting here shouldn't skip the Harley Cafe. There are French pastries from Welbeck's own bakery and cakes made on the premises. Today's shelves reveal Guinness and chocolate cake, scones, even a gluten-free something or other. Every one's a winner, and famished from the cold I ask for the stodgiest one they've got. Apparently it's the hummingbird cake. I take that on trust and choose a table outside.

In the Fifth Duke's day this place ►►



What a lovely steed! And the pony's not bad either

road, Peafield Lane, before entering woodland again near Robin Hood's Major Oak. It undulates by the grazed clearing to Budby South Forest, where another notice warns that the area was used for military training, adding "do not touch any debris you may find". This heathland today is a habitat for the nightjar, a ground-nesting summer visitor, or so the twitchers watching swans on Budby Lake tell me.

I cross another road, the A616, by

Top right: The quiet country roads are just what every cyclist longs for

STOP!



CAFE

For what **Welbeck's Harley Cafe** can't provide, try the Farm Shop next door, which has its own chocolatier and ales

PUBS

Preprandials: **The Dog and Duck**, Kings Clipstone; postprandials: **The Greendale Oak**, Cuckney (both serve food).

ACCOMMODATION

There's tap-and-a-toilet camping at **Lady Margaret Hall**, Welbeck (£7.50 per night), **Sherwood Forest Youth Hostel**, Edwinstowe (from £10 a night) or five-star B&B **Browns** in Holbeck from £60 a night

ACTIVITIES

From **Creswell Crags** to castle, craft centre, gallery visits and more, see www.harleygallery.co.uk/visit/things-to-do-in-the-area. For **Welbeck State Room Tours** go to www.welbeck.co.uk/experience/events

MAP

OS Explorer 270 Sherwood Forest



would have been swarming with workers and indeed it is today, as they are building a new gallery. The Duke's New Works, back in the 1860s, included a gallery too. His was underground of course, "vast, splendid and utterly comfortable," according to one withering critic. During endless excavations over a 25-year period up to his death, subsoil was carted away to make bricks and the braying of donkeys would have been heard far and wide as the Duke gave his workers donkeys to ease their commutes, and umbrellas to keep them dry. His nickname, the workers' friend, was well-earned: rowing boats were provided for recreational use by the employees on the estate's Great Lake, along with both ice and roller-skating rinks. It sounds like the Victorian equivalent of working for Google until you see the hours: 6am to 6pm, overtime optional.

Much like Sustrans today, the Fifth Duke didn't do things by halves. Whatever he couldn't convert, enlarge or extend was built from scratch. His new Riding House was second only to Moscow's Manege in size; an immense Poultry House was built for his chickens, complete with lawn, fruit trees, a fountain and dozens of miniature doors for the birds; glasshouses and a 1,000-foot long wall used braziers to ripen exotic fruit; his kitchen garden alone covered 22



Just one of the many information boards along the Sustrans route

acres and fed the resident workforce and families elsewhere, with lavish hampers frequently dispatched by steam locomotive.

Socks addict

Much is made of the Duke's activities, especially his miles of tunnels, and certainly his life story has its enigmatic detail, like the fact he wore balbriggan socks, inside silk ones, inside woollen ones, inside cork-soled boots. He inherited Welbeck in 1854, the decade when for the only time in British history the rural and urban populations drew equal as Britain sloughed off its agrarian past. In this same year, Paxton's Crystal Palace

Top: In Robin Hood country, the woods pepper Sustrans Route 6



The historic hamlet near King John's Palace

was rebuilt on Penge Peak, London, where the Fifth Duke was born. What's more, the idea of tunnelling under the English Channel had already been raised in Parliament, and London was poised to excavate what would become the Underground.

The Duke embraced the latest technology, and had the bicycle been invented by then he would have appreciated that too

no doubt. Yet exporting modern ideas to the provinces in Victorian times was bound to raise eyebrows, as did Sustrans's plan for thousands of miles of UK-wide cycling and walking routes. But what vision, and what legacies.

Such is the scope of Sustrans' Network that I had set aside a day to circumnavigate the Dukeries. Alas, my bright morning gave way to an afternoon of wintry weather, so I finished the cake and got back on the A60 to retrace my steps. For an A-road outside rush hour it wasn't too bad, yet had there been a tunnel in that direction, lit by skylights and gas lamps, I know where I would have headed.

End

Welbeck Village

The setting for 2015's First World War drama *Testament of Youth*, here's where the Fifth Duke used to send his laundry with instructions to be 'very slightly starched, scarcely perceptibly'.

At the village of Norton

Head west on Infield Lane to the A60, turning right to Welbeck.

Hazel Gap

Go left between fields after crossing the road at Budby Lakes.

By the B6030 is The Dog and Duck

Kings Clipstone, where you can eat al fresco with the remains of King John's Palace in clear view.

Newlands Road

I start on my old route to school, now part of Sustrans Route 6 in Forest Town, by the bags of free manure behind a plastics factory. Home sweet home!

Start/finish

Created with
memory-map

Folly nice: The Fourth Duke of Portland's Archway House



ROAD BOOK

Starting from Newlands Road, follow the unmade road (signposted Sustrans Route 6) straight on, crossing straight over Crown Farm Way towards the now green disused spoil heaps of Clipstone Colliery and Vicar Water Country Park.

Keeping the fishing lake on your right, bear left following the Sustrans 6 signpost near the golden hand statue, under the small bridge and straight

on to meet the B6030 by the Dog and Duck pub.

Cross straight over the B6030 (again Sustrans signed) onto Archway Road, bearing left under the second bridge on the unmade track running down to the River Maun then up into Sherwood Forest.

Continue straight on past Archway House and through the wood to cross over the A6075 Mansfield Road.

Follow the short stretch of singletrack into the clearing by the woods fringing Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve and press on to meet Netherfield Road by Budby Lakes.

Cross over the road here and follow the signposted byway veering a slight left between the fields of Hazel Gap Farm, leaving Route 6, which veers right here to Clumber Park.

Once out of the woods, the route heads back onto tarmac, turn left on Limetree Avenue to Norton Village.

Leave the hamlet of Norton on Infield Lane, striking out between farmland to meet the A60 at the T-junction, where you turn right then second right into Welbeck Estate at the Dukeries Garden Centre/Harley Cafe entrance.



A reet good ride

Lapping up dales, vales and ales, *Steve Thomas* takes a ride over Ilkley Moor and through the dramatic Yorkshire Dales

Words & photos Steve Thomas

With names like Appletreewick and Blubberhouses along the way, you could be excused for thinking that you were riding through a fantasy movie — caught up in the out-takes from *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings*. But no, this is the Yorkshire Dales, and places have strange names around here.

There's been no shortage of coverage about the Yorkshire Dales in a cycling context since the Tour de France passed through so boldly and brightly last year. It's no wonder. The rolling — and sometimes rumbling and



rocking — roads of the Dales are some of the finest in the land, especially if you are railing them on two skinny wheels with the sun on your back.

Guaranteed great

The cycling in this green and pleasant area, which comes neatly garnished with its characteristic drystone walls, is fully certified. These roads are not new; in fact, they are very old indeed and very tried, tested, ridden, framed, starred and trusted; satisfaction is guaranteed, and it always has been.

It would be wrong to call the riding

HEADS UP

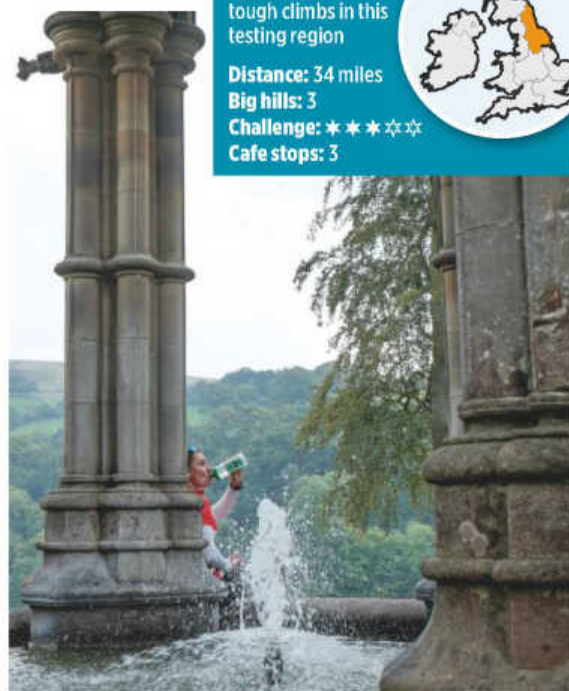
Majestic moorland views are the reward for taking on some tough climbs in this testing region

Distance: 34 miles

Big hills: 3

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆

Cafe stops: 3



**34
miles**

Dales National Park. They are a real treat for any cyclist. But there's a whole lot more out there too: rides that are still favoured by locals, rides just on the fringes of the main park, rides with big hills, big views and a big payback.

By combining a classic performance with a few little-known extras, and seasoning with practicality, this ride is a real Yorkshire terrier of a route: small, fierce, and totally adorable.

Needless to say, you can tailor this ride to fit, and as long as you keep to the basic styling, it will humbly dazzle and impress at every turn.

Relentless start

It kicks off straight out of Ilkley with a harsh lashing. Steep and without respite, the road clambers out of town and onto the moors. These moors are on the opposite side to the famous Ilkley Moors that were immortalised in the old folk song, which could be considered the county's own anthem, 'On Ilkla Moor Bar Tat' (meaning 'without a hat' — the traditional Yorkshire flat cap).

At this point you also cross the border of the National Park, and the

Top: Taking a refreshment break at the entrance to Bolton Abbey

Above: Classic Yorkshire Dales scenery; the hills keep coming

Below left: The many punchy climbs require frequent out-of-the-seat exertions

here a secret. It's more the case that those in the know — local cyclists and the occasional out-of-town riders — have kept it at the back of the top shelf, something only to be shared with special guests on very special occasions. And who could blame them?

For two whole days last July, the sun shone brightly (for a change) on the Dales, and the whole world got to see Yorkshire's finest natural beauty dancing in all of its glory across television screens. It was as if a huge great stash of gold had been uncovered, an endless pot of great

cycling opened up for all — and what's more, it's all for free, too.

Although the street cred of cycling in this region has gone through the roof, on the ground little has changed. The roads and the rides are just as great as ever, the climbs are as tough as they've always been, and now cyclists have gained a few extra notches of respect in the motorised public's eyes, which is all for the good.

The skinny and twisting roads to the north of the A59 east-west trans-Pennine expressway are the ones with the greatest reputation, as they criss-cross the heart of the Yorkshire



PUBS & CAFES

The Fuel Station, 25 Skipton Road, Ilkley, LS29 9EW Tel 01943 816101 www.ilkleycycles.co.uk
Open 9am-6pm daily (closed Wednesday during winter, 4pm closing Sunday). True cyclist's cafe at Ilkley Cycles

Cavendish Pavilion Cafe, Bolton Abbey, BD23 6AN Tel 01756 710245 www.cavendishpavilion.co.uk
Open 10am-5pm daily, until 4pm during winter. Nicely situated, a favourite for touring cyclists

The New Inn, Main Street, Appletreewick, BD23 5DA Tel 01756 720252 www.the-new-inn-appletreewick.com. Very bike friendly pub, great food and fantastic beer

BIKE SHOPS

Ilkley Cycles, 25 Skipton Road, Ilkley, LS29 9EW Tel 01943 816101 www.ilkleycycles.co.uk
Open 9am-6pm daily, closes 4pm Sunday

views as you ride over the moors are pure drama. So many passing cyclists miss out on this special treat as they follow the easier road along the river to reach the hallowed roads to the north.

After dropping down to the historic ruins of the 12th-century Bolton Abbey we ride into Wharfedale, which inspired the name for the Bradford-based loudspeaker manufacturer. This is a great spot to take tea and cakes, especially if it's a sunny day.

Through the dale the going is rolling,

"Late on a sunny summer's day, the views from Greenhow Hill are wheel-stoppingly beautiful"

Above: Drystone walls provide minimal yet visually delightful shelter
Below: Thanks to the Tour, establishments around here are very bike-friendly

right through to Appletreewick, a small and quaint village that is well worth the detour — especially if you're looking to sample fine Yorkshire ales and food. But be warned — there is a brutal climb straight out of here, so keep things light.

Although it's steep, thankfully the climb out is not excessively long, and it

is graced with an imposing backdrop, making it a little easier on the eye, if not on the legs.

Different rules apply

There's a great sense of relief as the road flattens out over the summit. This is about as far north as we get, and therefore you could be fooled into thinking that it's going to be all downhill from here on in. The logical rules of gravity seem not to apply around here.

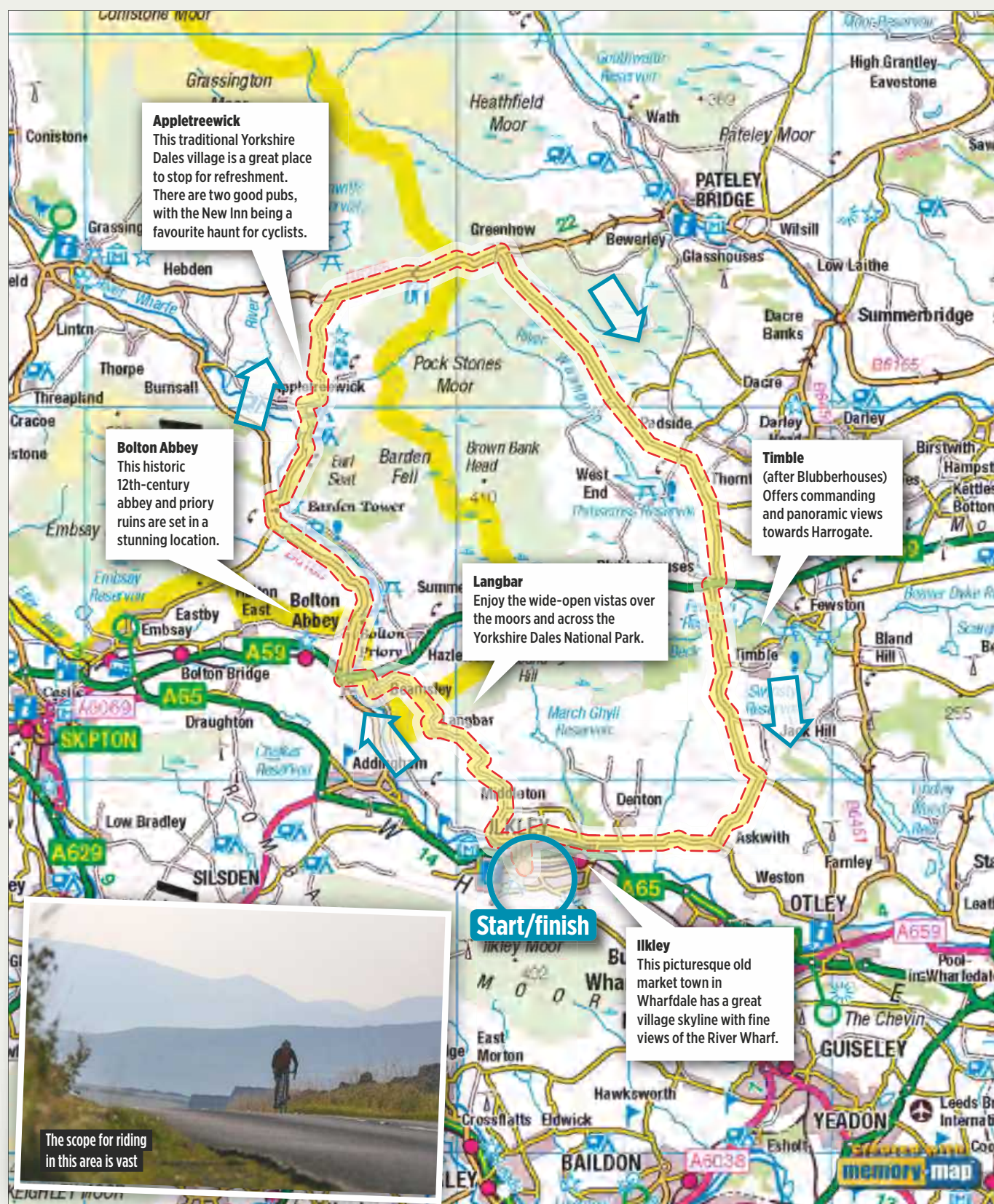
Turning right, the road rolls ahead, straight out in front of you and straight over a very distant horizon. It's a long, drawn-out and often cruel ride over to Greenhow Hill. The only shelter from the wind on this high rolling ridge comes from the drystone walls that line the road. Peer up from your stem and look over your left shoulder and you'll see a crumpled and distant landscape fading away behind you. Late on a sunny day, this view is close to wheel-stopping in proportion, and vies strongly for the best eye-candy of the ride, although there are several contenders for the title.

After what seems like a grind to eternity and halfway back again, the road turns right and rolls over and then down to Blubberhouses, a place immortalised by the race commentators on last year's Tour de France.

By now the ride is three parts cooked, but there's still one vital ingredient left to throw into the pot — the roller-coaster of a ride back over the moors to Ilkley.

All done this ride is just 34 miles, but these are Yorkshire miles, and not many of them are flat or come easy — but they sure are rewarding. **End**





Ordnance Survey mapping © Crown copyright. AM46/13. Created with Memory-Map

ROAD BOOK

From Ilkley town centre take the road that crosses the River Wharf and go straight ahead, uphill. Any of the left turns through the suburbs of Ilkley will lead you onto the minor Langbar Road and then Hardings Lane (signed for Langbar). Keep following this road as it climbs steeply and then crosses the

moors and drops steeply back down to the A59. If you don't want to start with a big climb, keep left before climbing to Langbar and follow the minor road alongside the river. Cross the main road and pick up the cycle route on the opposite side, turning left to reach Bolton Bridge, and then right along the B6160 and through the village.

Turn right at Barden Tower and cross the river, follow the narrow road up along the Dale, and keep left to Appletreewick. (If you do not want to stop off for any reason keep right at the T-junction and cut

out the very short detour to Appletreewick.)

From Appletreewick retrace and keep following the minor road as it climbs steeply up to the B6265. Turn right and follow this up to the summit of Greenhow Hill. Turn right on to the minor road to Blubberhouses.

On reaching the main A59, turn right and then first left by the church (towards Otley). Follow the minor road over the moors and then turn left for Askwith (and Ilkley). Keep right and follow the minor road back alongside the River Wharf to Ilkley.



Riding with the horses

Paul Kirkwood gets a first taste of Continental cycling, and some fascinating wildlife, on a tour of south-western Provence

Words and pics: Paul Kirkwood

I've been on cycle tours around the Scottish islands that, without exaggeration, have taken longer to plan than to ride. I enjoy the research to a degree but the opportunity to have someone else do all the legwork (in an organisational sense at least) had considerable appeal especially for my first foreign foray.

That's how I came to book a prescribed, self-guided tour of Provence in May with cycle hire, accommodation and luggage transfer all included. I was a bit worried that the trip was almost going to be too easy. After all, what's a cycling holiday without some adversity?

The starting point, Tarascon, is described in the copious notes provided by the holiday company as a "workaday town". That said, it does provide the base for a first-rate day ride to St-Rémy-de-Provence, one of the region's oldest towns. First, though, I got to know the Mistral, both the man and the wind named after him that blows from the

Alps down the Rhône valley. Gusts swirled around me as I headed out of town and into the countryside. Still, at least the wind wasn't as persistent as I'd encountered in Shetland and the Outer Hebrides and was considerably warmer. Frédéric Mistral, a poet and keen exponent of the Provençal language, once lived in the village of Maillane, which is passed en route and has a museum in his honour.

A stretch of old railway path led me to St-Rémy. You could spend all day wandering around the network of alleys in this compact walled city which includes the birthplace of Nostradamus.

The array of boulangeries and patisseries made a nice change from the small supermarkets which I ordinarily frequent for my lunch when in the wilds of Scotland.

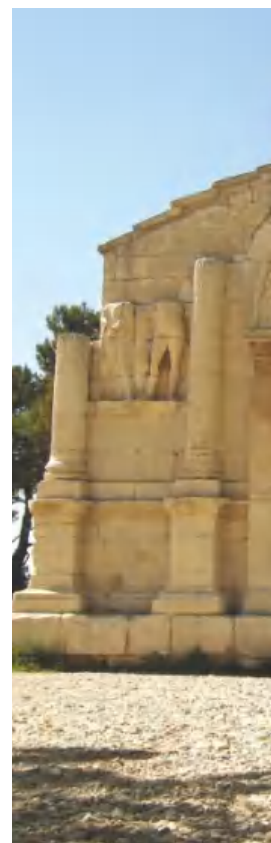
A short ride up and out of town took me past panels showing 21 scenes of the area from the 150 painted by Vincent van Gogh during his stay at a mental hospital in a former monastery. On the



Quirky cycle path signage

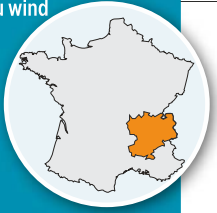
other side of the road is the Roman town of Glanum. From the viewpoint overlooking the ruins I could see a jumble of baths, temples and pavements. Looming behind were Les Alpilles, a range of precarious pinnacles that look like the surf of a wave about to engulf the plain and, in the far distance, I could just make out the outline of Mont Ventoux, the notorious Tour de France climb. I barely encountered a hill on my whole tour, which suited me well.

My return trip to Tarascon ran along the base of Les Alpilles past olive groves and freakishly slender Italian cypress trees, their tops tickled by the wind and sufficiently tapered to take a Christmas fairy. As I neared the town, I passed a tanned old man on a bike who carried a baguette across his rear rack — a pleasingly clichéd image to end my first day's cycling in France.



HEADS UP

Take your time as you wind your way through historic towns and across the Camargue nature reserve to the Mediterranean coast



Distance: up to 83 miles

Big hills: None

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆☆

Cafe stops: Lots



up to
83
miles

Boules and bikes...
now where's the boulangerie?



The other Arc de Triomphe —
Glanum's diminutive offering



Picturesque Fontvieille,
a cycle tourer's paradise

On to Arles

The next day I was on the move to my second overnight destination, Arles. The morning stop-off was in Fontvieille, a quieter and less touristy town compared to St-Rémy. As I cruised in at 11 o'clock tables were being laid outside the restaurants and the smell of roast lamb (a regional speciality) seemed to waft from every open window.

My cycling notes had suggested a walk in pine woods linking four windmills associated with the writer and

former resident Alphonse Daudet. Not wishing to be parted from my bike I tried cycling the trail, which was viable other than a short push up a rocky lane at the start. A rare hill, downwards, took me to a Roman aqueduct which today spans the road like a tank wall. The structure was a foretaste of the artefacts to come in Arles.

If your visit coincides with a Saturday you should either arrive when the city's renowned weekly market is in progress (if you're into that sort of **»**)

Cutting across the Place de la République in Arles



STOP!

GETTING THERE

Fly from many UK airports with Ryanair to either Marseille, Montpellier or Nîmes for less than £100 return.

GUIDED BY

The 'Impressions of the Camargue' self-guided cycling holiday from Inntravel includes cycle hire, six nights' accommodation, three dinners, luggage transfer between hotels and detailed cycling notes. Price around £850 per person based on two people sharing excluding flights. Inntravel.co.uk and 01653 617001.

Arles's Roman ruins are well preserved



Heads up: a monument to Van Gogh





“As I neared the town, I passed an old man on a bike who carried a baguette on his rear rack”

Travelling light: cruising past Gacholle lighthouse near Saintes Maries de la Mer



Les Arnelles hotel: quaint Provençal lodgings

thing) or after it's finished but not, as I did, while it's being cleared away. I was almost hosed off my bike (OK — that may be a slight exaggeration) as I weaved my way through the road-sweeping vehicles while trying to find the turn for the Place de la République. Centred on an obelisk, the square was an oasis of calm and, after weaving my way down narrow streets lined with restaurants and shops, I reached journey's end.

Arles makes a fantastic rest day. I wandered around its many architectural and archaeological treasures including the huge amphitheatre (used today for bullfighting), spooky, dripping catacombs, and thermal baths, winding up with a dinner of the juiciest steak I've ever tasted.

Best till last

The final leg of the journey was when the ride really came into its own. The stretch of the route after the hamlet of Gimeaux provided the best cycling of the tour. Grass grew in the middle of the lane, with reed beds on either side giving a hint of what was to come.

I was heading further south into and across the Camargue delta, a vast and environmentally unique nature reserve of lagoons and salt flats that stretches as far as the eye can see. Having topped up my water bottle at the last watering stop at a sort of ranch attraction, I set out along an eight-mile stony track right through the midst of all the flora and fauna. I'd soon seen the big three: white horses, Camargue black bulls (distinguished by their

upcurved horns) and scores of flamingos. A pencil line of trees on the distant far side of Etang de Vaccarès was the only way I could tell which blue belonged to water and which to the sky.

After a mile or two most of the tourist four-wheel drives had turned back, leaving me blissfully alone. The ride had become an adventure. With the sun beating down, crossing a flat, empty landscape, and cycling on a track into a slight wind I felt like Mark Beaumont on one of his godforsaken cross-continental expeditions. Well, a bit like Mark Beaumont; at least I had my frisson of adversity.

While resting all I could hear was the lapping of the tiny lagoon waves and the distant honk of flamingos — or were they ducks? The Camargue is a twitcher's paradise and, with all the horses, ideal for riders of both two-wheels and four legs.

My journey concluded at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, a lively seaside town whose crazy golf, promenade and miniature railway felt much more British than French. On my final day I ventured out through the lagoons along the coast on another traffic-free track. With the tide out you could almost forget which side the sea was on.

A lonely lighthouse doubled up as my destination and official finishing post at the end of a grand tour of the history, culture and wildlife of western Provence.

End

Touring Tenerife

Stark beauty, lung-busting climbs and Spain's highest peak

Words Cath Harris Pictures: Chris Beynon, Cath Harris





HEADS UP

Escape Tenerife's glitzy resorts and head instead for its climbs, magical forests and stunning Teide National Park.

Distance: 181 miles

Big hills: 6

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆☆

Cafe stops: Lots



Oh! Where to start? Precipitous Masca clinging to the walls of a spiky gorge and accessed only by a vertiginous hairpinned road? Weird rock formations and teetering volcanic relics that will crash to the ground when wind erodes their base? Drooping palms, chiselled ravines, or ginormous, incredible Teide National Park where every stone and even grain of sand marks the passage of time? All this and more I and companion Chris saw, felt and wondered at in just a week's cycling in Tenerife.

It was a short but unnerving ride from the island's south-coast airport to our first hotel in El Médano. Within minutes we were climbing alongside dusty scrub and untidy buildings towards San Isidro's strange brick-red terraces, reminiscent of TV soaps and modern eco homes too. The wind swirled, the gradient increased and I was quickly reminded of how much tougher cycling is with heavy panniers. It was not an encouraging start!

The road to Teide

After a blustery bend spirits lifted as we reached El Médano and its sun-soaked shoreline. Volcanic rock pools drew sanderlings and ringed plovers — wading birds seeking shellfish on which to feed. Against the sky was a flotilla of coloured rectangular sails steered by kite surfers for whom the town's gusty beach and angry waves are a boon. Behind the town are Montañas Roja and Bocinegro, two of the scores of volcanic domes that pepper the island. From 171m Roja — the Red Mountain — we saw acres of curious, flat, rectangular brown plateaus

upto
181
miles

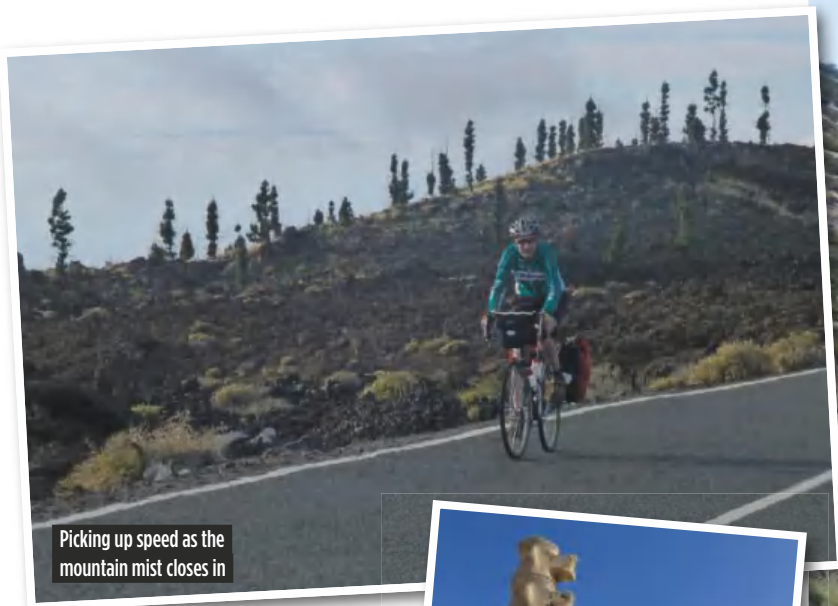
resembling row upon row of huge and tightly fitting shoebox lids.

From the gentler coast road to Los Cristianos early the following morning, my mind shaped Castilian castles looming from the darkness. Reality brought those high-sided brown oblongs close up: they were huge netted areas protecting rambling banana crops. We followed the resort's packed beach of imported sand through a throb of humanity, past glitzy shopping arcades and Disney-like faux palaces. Blackcaps and chiffchaffs sang despite the hubbub. Cobbled one-lane roads, ample street furniture and a succession of pedestrian crossings made cycling surprisingly easy.

The northbound road edged a series of dry river beds and more



Teide National Park's perfect
for training or touring



Picking up speed as the mountain mist closes in

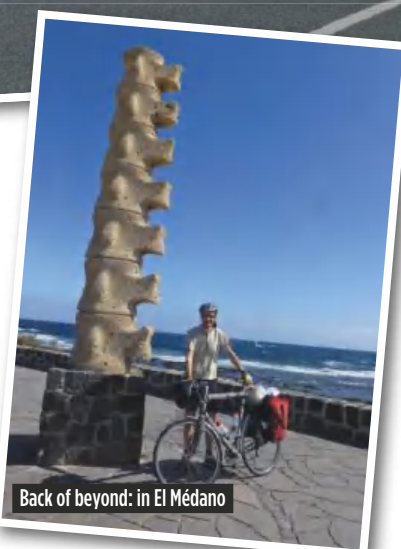
netted enclosures containing tomatoes and basil. We diverted at Playa San Juan to a cafe in a quiet square where Brits on a neighbouring table exchanged stories of timeshare troubles. Temperatures rose on the climb just beyond, where cacti dominated the hillsides. Their bloated leaves bore red and yellow oval-shaped fruit — the non-native but widespread prickly pear.

The pear is edible but ice creams were more enticing two turns on, savoured from the sunny balcony of a Tamaimo bar. Remounting brought the first clear picture of snow-feathered Teide volcano and a rapid drop in temperature as we reached exposed Santiago del Teide. Spain's highest mountain at 3,718m dominates the island and from our distant viewpoint seemed a near perfect cone.

Volcano adventure

Teide was for the following day and we had another call to make before turning towards the peak. Blissfully offloading panniers for half a day at Santiago's excellent La Casona del Patio Hotel, we tackled the five hairpins to the col above Masca. The hamlet perches precariously on the spine of a ravine, a spectacular location drawing coaches, rental cars and taxis. From the col, the road wound intricately and steeply down before sweeping over the next ridge and on to the coast. Away from Masca's wandering crowds, Canary date palms shaded ancient terraces. Honey bees probed for nectar in almond blossom.

Back in Santiago we dwelt in sunshine next to domed, beribboned San Fernando Church from where, legend has it, terrified worshippers placed a religious figure in front of Teide's boiling lava and halted its flow. The turmoil of the seething mass is apparent above the town where the road bisects strips of once tumbling rocks and soil. A vivid grove of blooming almond trees alongside had lured convoys of keen photographers.



Back of beyond: in El Médano



Prickly pear, anyone?

From the trees' pink or white blooms, came an occasional faint scent. Silence enveloped us as we climbed, bar the whirr of tyres on road.

At 1,000 metres we reached Tenerife's verdant Canary pine forest where charred trunks bore witness to a vicious 2014 fire. A coach thundered in the opposite direction followed by a trailer bearing stacks of road bikes and a glance in its wake showed another cyclist, clad in bright green. He swept past with a grunt but it was impossible to miss his Tinkoff-branded bike and kit. Didn't Spanish cycling legend Alberto Contador ride for Tinkoff we pondered, only for the man himself to follow, perhaps chasing his hare.

As we wound into Teide National Park, tree cover dwindled as the swathes of volcanic stones grew to boulders. At the base of Teide, the

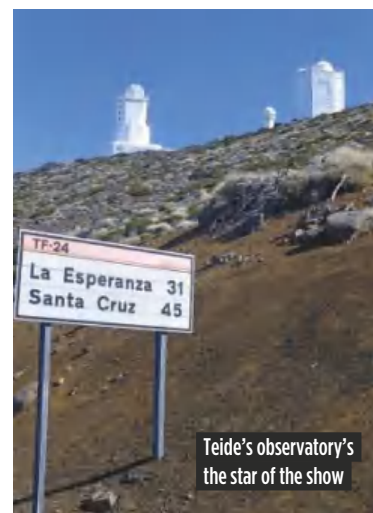
setting sun cast the jagged rocky outcrop, Roques de García, in shades of orange, yellow and green.

Teide itself last erupted in 1909 and remains active. It towers over a vast and desolate caldera, formed by post-eruption land-collapse, and the 73-square-mile national park in which only one hotel is allowed. We shared the hotel with Contador and co, who were riding the climb every day of their stay. Roadside information boards would have been of no interest to them but to us and other visitors they yielded history, geology and astronomy, and witness Bernardo Collogan Fallow's account of Teide's eruption. It threw a column of fire and stones "a quarter of a league high" with explosions so powerful that it seemed "the very ground we trod fled from us", he recalls. We could see Teide Observatory's huge





Snow-capped Teide towers over an otherworldly vista



Teide's observatory's the star of the show

STOP!



MOST MEMORABLE

Cafe: Pastelería Díaz, Calle Obispo Rey Redondo, La Laguna, www.bit.ly/1KrnG40

Drink: Thick, dark, steaming hot chocolate

View: Cloud inversion around Teide.

Sight: The moon, directly above, at Teide National Park

Sound: The whirr of tyres on tarmac and nothing else

Smell: The heavy scent of roadside eucalyptus

Flowers: Groves of blossoming almond trees

Road: Crossing multiple east coast gorges alongside hundreds of riders out for the day

Hotel: La Casona del Patio, Santiago del Teide

Food: Bananas tasting of banana

PLACES OF INTEREST

Masca: Arrive before the coaches

Teide National Park: Awe-inspiring and spectacular

La Laguna: Elegant but youthful old town



Tinkoff team-mates get the miles in

telescopes on the crest east of the mountain, overlooking thick white cloud cocooning the north-east coast. The descent through the soggy fog was freezing; at La Laguna we rewarded ourselves with two portions of cake.

Lush farmland enveloped the former capital where there were detached flat-roofed homes, painted turquoise, peach, royal blue or emerald green. The city is a World Heritage Site and was the first non-fortified Spanish town on the island. Behind its elegant facades, elaborately carved balconies overlook square courtyards. Strapping dragon trees grow outside the rebuilt cathedral. The resin of these unusual plants has been used to colour Stradivarius violins.

After a day's break we rode south, above the east coast, across a succession of spectacular dry gorges.

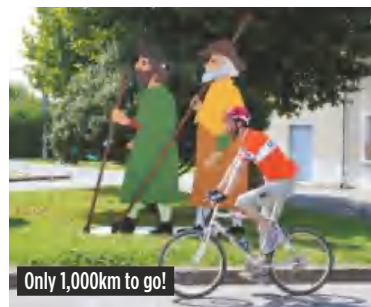
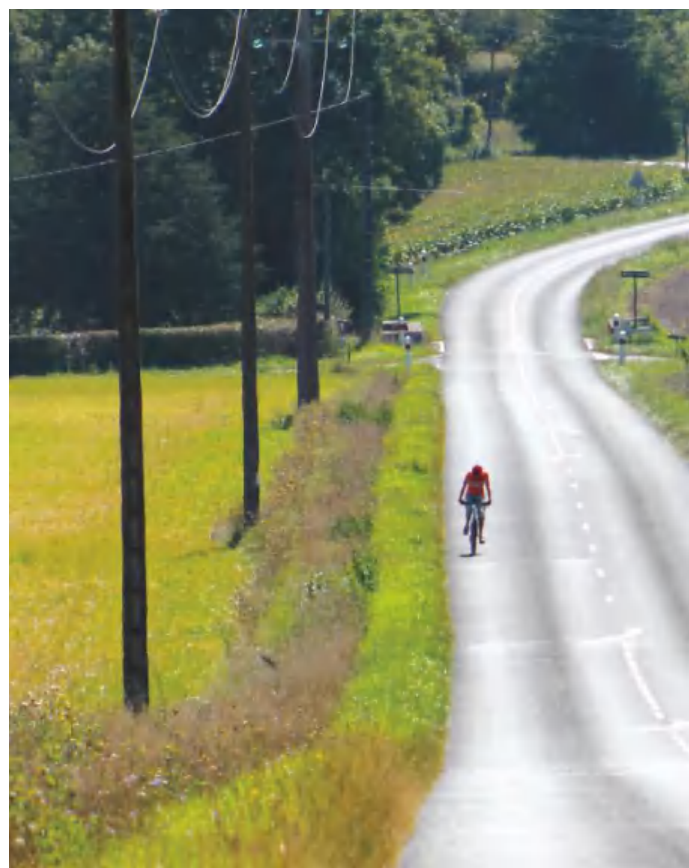
Long strips of bark were splitting from eucalyptus trunks and occasionally we caught the trees' heavy scent. Sturdily terraced fields lined hillsides interspersed with ramshackle homesteads. Cockerels crowed and I heard rodents scurry into the dense foliage of roadside daisies. Small colonies of dusty cochineal beetles fed on prickly pear leaves – Canarians once harvested red dye from the insects. Hundreds of cyclists sped past in both directions, on Saturday morning rides.

We rested in Arico, spying the distinctive outlines of Montañas Roja and Bocinegro, and were soon sweeping through the dusty outskirts of San Isidro on route to El Médano. Enthused by our trip, we resolved to return to the island. "Let's climb to Teide from the north though," Chris said. "It might be a bit warmer!" **End**

Pilgrim's progress

Smooth roads, minimal traffic and blazing fields of sunflowers leave *Jamie Ewbank* convinced that France's Poitou-Charentes region is the perfect cycling destination

Words Jamie Ewbank Photos David Conlon and Jamie Ewbank



This part of the Charente is not particularly touristy. You can tell that because none of the shops or cafes in any of the towns ever appears open, and the road we start on, by a beach at a man-made lake (Plan d'eau des Gours) near Les Gours, doesn't show up on GPS. Despite the unexpected 30°C heat we resisted the chance for a swim and set off on the opening stretch, a gentle downhill run through the hamlet of Richard following signs towards Saint-Fraigne, a commune with fewer than 500 people that's our first intended stop.

Taking a left off the high street onto the D182 we headed up the hillside, past Saint-Fraigne's beautiful cemetery, to a small copse, isolated from the larger Forêt Tusson and supposedly containing the remnants of World War Two fortifications. After 20 minutes of searching, we emerged mystified to have found nothing of greater historical interest than a pile of municipal lamp posts, abandoned and overgrown. We weren't the only forlorn sightseers — some soul before us had magic

marked a bemused question mark on the tourist signs.

On a positive note, the brief nine per cent gradient up the hill was the steepest part of the day's ride — always nice to tackle that in the first 10 minutes! Past the copse, we turned right into a maze of farm tracks, narrow tarmacked pathways twisting and crossing through mile after mile of maize fields. Despite no road names, there's no fear of getting lost: French road signs in the middle of nowhere are more comprehensive than in central London. We followed the signs to Ebréon, and took the main road past its hilltop church, bearing right and dropping gently down the D31 onto the D737, the closest thing here to a major road.

Road less travelled

Ordinarily, a major road is to be avoided when plotting a ride, but the roads of the Charente deserve a special mention. Even the narrow farm tracks are smooth and well surfaced, and the

main roads have seemingly friction-free tarmac, and there's no traffic — on average we saw four or five cars an hour on the main roads, and none for a 10-mile stretch.

Regrettably, the bikes we were riding on were perhaps not ideal. Having been assured by our hosts that they could provide bicycles, which previously has ranged from vintage steel to terrifyingly expensive carbon) we found ourselves on a selection of Optimist Active mountain bikes (no, we'd never heard of them either). The rear wheel on one was out of true both laterally and radially. It bumped vertically with every revolution, and hooted calmly against the brakes. Yet this bike set several new Strava KoMs in the Poitou-Charentes — which just goes to show how untravelled the area is.

Aigre was so subdued even the PMU bookmakers was closed. The only activity was in a school playground, where a collection of sarcastic French children cried "Allez

40 miles



Smooth roads make for blissful country riding



Virenque" as we spun up the long, shallow climb out of town. Why not "Allez Rolland" or "Allez Pinot"? How does Virenque still have such a hold 10 years after retirement?

From the top of the hill the beauty of the Charente is laid out for your enjoyment. The area is mostly farmland, and it drops away gently in a series of humps and valleys, each covered in maize, sunflower and fallow fields, providing endless opportunities for that quintessential French cycling



THINGS TO SEE

La Cité is in a renovated mill on the banks of the Charente. The international comics museum contains original artwork by the pioneers of the medium, as well as hosting themed exhibitions. www.citebd.org

BIKE HIRE

Bike Hire Direct offers individual, couple and family rental packages, as well as free drop-off and collection to your hotel or gîte. www.bikehiredirect.com

GETTING THERE

La Rochelle International Airport is less than two hours drive from Saint-Fraigne.

Eurostar runs to Marne-la-Vallée where you can change to a TGV to Angoulême, which is less than 40 minutes from Saint-Fraigne.

photo of a rider surrounded by nodding yellow flowers.

Falling away to the left is the D736 leading down to the next set of ruins on our ride, the 12th century Priory of Our Lady of Lanville. The picturesque remains played host to a selection of watchful crows that disapproved noisily of cyclists stopping for a sandwich.

Devoted to the journey

Although we're not particularly spiritual, it was hard not to be impressed with the devotion on show here. The northernmost of the four Camino Frances trails passes through this area; the tip of a pilgrim's route that stretches down to the Pyrenees, and then through Spain to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela. No matter how tough a day in the saddle you're having, spare a thought that some people will walk over 1,000km from this spot. It's hard not to doff your *casquette* to the hikers who set out from here to Spain.

From here on, the route was frequently dotted with the yellow-and-blue scallop symbol of the Camino, not to mention the giant models of pilgrims themselves, but it's the Charente river itself that is the most eye-catching sight for the next few miles. Our route crossed it on numerous occasions, and from every bridge it presents a different view. Whether it's hung with weeping willows, coursing past quiet, grassy islands, or playing host to strings of gaudy narrowboats, it repeatedly makes you want to live by a river.

Continuing along the D737 through Vouharte we encountered another gentle climb, one that typifies the day — lots of big sprocket, but no little ring. Over the hill from Vouharte, we arrived in Montignac-Charente and were spoiled for views: to our left was the abbey and castle, riddled with stone stairways ascending the hillside, and to our right, the river and perhaps the most picturesque sight on the route, a house which straddles the river from bank to island. Choosing this option, we took the riverbank into the centre of town and a stop for coffee.

From Montignac there's a choice — our first trip out this way saw us carry on to Angoulême, the largest town in the area. Approached via a steep climb past a monastery, a long false flat, then a second fierce ramp complete with 90° hairpin, the trip into Angoulême provides a small workout for those who aren't feeling challenged. The town is also home to a different type of Lycra-clad heroics thanks to the Cité International de la Bande Dessinée, or France's national comics museum. It's an enjoyable distraction, and Angoulême itself is decorated with random murals depicting everyone from European favourites like Spirou, to internationally famous characters like Asterix and Calvin and Hobbes. You can even refuel in a Chinese restaurant themed around Tintin's Blue Lotus.

HEADS UP

A scenic, rolling route taking in rural France's sleepy villages and Medieval abbeys



Distance: 40 miles

Big hills: None

Challenge: ★★☆☆☆

Cafe stops: One

On the downside, however, Angoulême is a proper town, with proper traffic and fewer beautiful views, so we instead turned left up the D15 towards Saint-Amant-de-Boixe, a town that was the home of Eugène Delacroix and is dominated by a towering abbey so huge you can't help but wonder why such a quiet, deserted area could ever have needed such a Brobdingnagian building.

Pass on the Cognac

From here the flavour of our route started to change, as we left behind the strings of well-kept fields and tiny villages in favour of some dustier rurality. The fields are smaller, more higgledy-piggledy, and broken up by the occasional small copse or larger wood, while the towns themselves are little more than collections of houses — two here, four there. We followed signs towards Xambes (a town that continues the religious theme of the day by claiming to have the remains of Mary Magdalene in its waterwell), Coulonges and Ambérac along the D32 and D88. The road signs in this area are handmade with planks and paint, attached to the stone walls of barns. Yet even here in the backwoods of an already quiet area, the road surfaces are smooth and well maintained, and we again marvelled that we were riding the best roads we'd ever seen on the worst bikes we'd ever ridden.

The road rises out of Coulonges almost imperceptibly, but after miles of barely noticeable rise, you get a blissful payoff in the sweeping S-bends of the descent towards Ambérac. We swooped down out of the sun into the relief of shady woodland of the D88 back into Aigre.

From here we headed along the D79, taking the back route towards Ebréon and its maze of farm tracks. Out here surprisingly modern views are hidden behind antiquity, as tumbledown medieval walls and gatehouses conceal a sight we barely glimpsed but which astonished us — a deep quarry, layered and descending a good 100 feet into the hillsides. It almost seems a shame to point out such heavy industry, but we couldn't help but marvel at the careful camouflage that stopped it from ruining the landscape. Presumably this little hub of activity is the reason why the roads in these parts are so well-maintained.

Tracking back along the final part of our figure of eight into Les Gours we pondered the post-ride possibilities. The local specialities are Cognac and the Charentais melon. After four hours and 40 miles in the sun, the Cognac didn't appeal, but the melon, eaten sitting on a man-made lakeside beach, was as perfect as the roads.

End

Cycling Istanbul

Tackling the Turkish capital's infamously chaotic roads on two wheels is not for the faint-hearted but thankfully cycling culture is gradually taking root

Words and pics: Julian Sayerer

Istanbul is a city I associate more with riding to or from than in; here I have mostly either packed up a bicycle on arrival and happily given it a rest, or else dusted it off from a bedroom and prepared to set back to pedalling. I've ridden here three times via the Adriatic and Balkans (Northern Italy, coastal Croatia, across the north of Greece) and twice — perhaps the more obvious route — through central and eastern Europe. I've ridden out of here once via the Turkish coast — hopping boats between Greek islands and then on to Italy; and once via a two-day ferry crossing of the Black Sea to Odessa in the Ukraine, before riding west into Poland. The ferry to the Ukraine is now defunct, Odessa has been the scene of then-unthinkable violence between ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, and in many ways the world seems a rather different place than it did on my first cycle across Europe 10 years ago.

One thing stubbornly unchanging is the experience of cycling in Istanbul. My first experience of the city was living here for a year at the age of 22 and, after observing the terrifying traffic, I promptly dismissed all thought of ever cycling as a means of getting about the place. Then, when work obliged me to cram myself into a tram or metro for a three-hour round trip twice a week, the prospect of fresh air and getting back six hours of my life every week turned my mind back to two wheels.

It's a situation familiar to commuters in large cities all over the world — the unfortunate and unpleasant necessity of wasting time stuck in stationary traffic. In a city of 12 million and unofficially (once all of the slum populations, constantly-arriving

An Enclave

Bisiklet Gezgini (Travelling Bicycle) sits in a converted house surrounded by trees, a place where the owners — in obvious commitment to the ideal of community that comes with all the world's best bike shops, but also reflects Turkey's traditional hospitality — organise rides and will put out home-made cookies for visiting customers.

The nice touches, however, correspond to no sacrifice in knowhow; a good bike shop is a common (but hard to find) requirement for cyclists passing through Istanbul, and Bisiklet Gezgini are now certainly the best place for repairs and supplies. As well as knowing how to service a Rohloff (always an indicator of high-level mechanical competency), the shop also stocks Brooks saddles and Ortlieb bags (surely the only two things, other than a bicycle, any touring cyclist really needs!). The best testament to being in the safe hands of people who really understand bikes is a stock of German-made Fahrrad Manufakturs — arguably the most complete tourer — commuter bicycle going. This alone is evidence for people who genuinely love and get cycling in a very special way.



migrant workers and now Syrian refugees have been totalled up) around 18 million people, Istanbul endures particularly acute traffic problems. And yet, 'endures' is not always the right word; when urban planners from Tokyo — the world's most densely populated city — arrived in Istanbul for a consultation, it was with a peculiar pride that the Turkish authorities and media seemed to react to the opinion that the city's transport model was irredeemably crap, terminal, and generally beyond most ordinary means of improvement. The sentiment chimes with a remark Istanbulers will often be found to make about their city: "They call it chaos... we call it home."

Cars and planning

That Istanbul is a city, however, is an argument not universally accepted. On the one hand, of course it is one of the world's classic 'megapolises': an informal league also consisting of the likes of Shanghai, Sao Paulo, Mumbai, Lagos, and Jakarta. On the other hand, Istanbul is described by many of the city's urban academics as — charmingly — the world's largest village. They have a point: pavements weave higgledy-piggledy at varying (narrow) widths and scant traffic regulations are unobserved and unenforced — meaning double parking and cars on pavements are common features. Roads that might be sustainable in a settlement of two dozen inhabitants seem like madness in a city of millions.

Istanbul — like London — bears the hallmarks of winding streets still loyal to their medieval layout. Neither city has the authoritative stamp of city planning in the

Routes into Istanbul

Istanbul is a lively destination for touring cyclists, sitting at a Europe-Asia pinch point that is spanned by either the (illegal to bicycles — not that this law is enforced) Bosphorus bridges, or a short ferry ride across the water. Others will combine a break in the city with a visit to an embassy or consulate in the process of applying for a new visa for the next phase of their journey.

Over the years I have met cyclists on their way around the whole world, two couples on their way to Australia, one man headed for Siberia, and a handful of people completing European tours. Many more heavily Ortlieb-laden bicycles have also passed me by, inspiring no more than a fleeting thought for who these travellers were and where they were going.



Cycling in Istanbul, one of the world's few megalopolises



Distance: Bosphorus straight is 20 miles
Big hills: Undulating
Challenge: ★★☆☆☆
Cafe stops: Lots



Bosphorus bridge links Europe to Asia

way that, say, Napoleon and Haussmann opened Paris's boulevards, Berlin was rebuilt out of the rubble of World War Two, or New York and other US cities were planned from scratch. In contrast, Istanbul was built at a time when human technologies and populations were limited to the smaller scales and needs of ancient civilisations.

Moreover, just as Turkish police are now known to fire tear gas canisters directly at protesters, and corporate negligence resulted in the 2014 deaths of over 400 miners in a collapsed mineshaft in Soma, human life is given a tragically low value in Turkey. A large threshold for accidents is deemed permissible, fatalities are accepted as a sad fact of life and there is slim urgency to rectify the situation. In such a culture, roads and road safety are given low priority and permitted to become lawless.

To compound this issue, the bicycle in Turkey suffers a plight similar to the one it meets in China (CA, January 2015). In a country where cars are symbols of wealth, poor people in Turkey will use bicycles for transport and to carry goods, and children of course ride them for fun, but it is only a small number of the urban middle classes who regard them as part of an efficient, healthy metropolitan lifestyle — that uniquely aspirational status that the bicycle is now beginning to enjoy in cities internationally. The words of Enrique Peñalosa, former Mayor of Bogota, Colombia, have yet to reach many cities in which the sentiment would be valuable, not least of all Istanbul: "A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars. It's where the rich use public transport."

Pioneers

There is, nonetheless, room for optimism. At the age of 22, on my 10-mile commute to and from work, I would find myself likening the ride through Istanbul's traffic to dodging falling boulders — a sort of extreme sport, and a comparison I've often found to be true of London. What I now find odd to recall is that the description was intended as a positive one — a good reason for cycling. These days, my sense of invulnerability is not quite what it was; falling boulders are not what I'm after when commuting in a city.



Negotiating the melee is often part of the fun



Some cycle paths are happily separated from the main road

What's the best road in?

This is a common question among those embarking on a ride that takes them into Istanbul from the west. Hot concrete, cruel traffic and choking pollution should be argument enough against following the main road all the way from the Bulgarian border, after the cities of Vize and Saray.

The coastal road, along the bottom via the city of Silivri is better, and is now partly accompanied by a cycle path. For those happy with the prospect of a detour, by far the best way is to hold a northern route, up towards the mouth of the Black Sea, before riding down along the Bosphorus road and passing a mixture of sleepy, old fishing villages and luxury houses and yachts as you go. The Bosphorus is well-adorned with some of the city's most renowned cafes and restaurants, and Turkish tea, Turkish coffee or — if you're arriving early — a lavish Turkish breakfast, are all the more enjoyable next to the water, and after cycling in along roads that make for much more pleasurable riding.

Some Istanbulers, however, to their immense credit, defy the automobile lunacy of the place and nevertheless take to two wheels.

A quick sight of them reminds you that the bicycle is a great way to see what is a truly brilliant city. More even than that, as cycling becomes synonymous with modern urban living, so have some public galleries and cafes taken to installing bicycle racks; outside one of the many fashionable cafes in the now-gentrified district of Cihangir, the sight of a bicycle leaning beside a young man drinking an espresso is reminiscent of Brooklyn or Hackney. The coastal routes along the Bosphorus strait have been redeveloped for cycling, and though this is not the same as a city with roads fit for cycling, it nevertheless helps a few people to an easier commute, while — through enabling recreational cycling — also showing Istanbulers a positive and inspiring example of what a pleasure cycling can be.

As the Gezi Park protests of 2013 demonstrated, Turkey is a country with a young population, smitten with the internet and social media, and constantly looking at the outside world for examples of the lifestyles and rights currently denied by the current authoritarian AKP government.

If the liberal reformers have it their way Turkey will hopefully see improvements in women's rights, freedom of the press, and government corruption. With luck, the cultural changes that accompany these processes will see cities like Istanbul designed around people rather than the need to accommodate aggressive and often unnecessary driving.

When this happens, Istanbul's valiant community of cyclists, and many cyclists in waiting, will hopefully become a more regular sight in this city. Certainly, in the 10 years since I first came here, the trends are slow, but promising.



Istanbulers are discovering the joy of two wheels



A traffic lull at dusk opens up ride opportunities


















Kids' stuff: bikes are most popular with the young

Things to do August and September

There's still time to find an event to stretch your legs before the best of the summer slips by

Key to regions

 Scotland	 North-East	 East
 N. Ireland	 North-West	 Central
 Ireland	 Yorkshire	 South-East
 Isle of Man	 East Midlands	 South
 Wales	 West Midlands	 South-West



Photos: Daniel Gould, Chris Catchpole, Phil O'Connor, Rupert Fowler, Andy Jones

SATURDAY AUGUST 15

SCOTLAND LOCHABER 100s

HQ Kilmallie Community Centre, Corpach, PH33 7JH

How far 62/100 miles

Entry £25

CA says Up for a challenge? Try this lumpy 100-miler. If that sounds too hard, the 62-mile route, billed as 'almost completely flat', could be a better option. It leads riders around Loch Eil and Loch Linnhe. The ride is raise funds for Fort William Baptist Church through Tearfund Cycling. www.tearfundcycling.btck.co.uk CF/FS/ATC/EM

GLOUCESTERSHIRE WIGGLE COTSWOLDS

HQ Cheltenham Racecourse, GL50 4SH

How far 40/75/105 miles

Entry £23/£33

CA says Leaving from where many a Gold Cup has taken place, the ride leads out onto relentlessly rolling lanes. The Cotswold Hills quickly rear up, whichever route you take. Pick up some time on the rolling lanes back to the finish to hopefully get your own gold standard time.

[@ukcyclingevents](https://twitter.com/ukcyclingevents)

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

CF/FS/EOL/EM/ET

SUNDAY AUGUST 16

YORKSHIRE ACTION YORK 100

HQ Sports Centre, University of York, YO10 5DD

How far 40/67/102 miles

Entry £55

CA says From the city of York you can tick off a few of the county's gems like the Yorkshire Wolds, Howardian Hills, the flatlands of the Vale of York and you'll also pass by the impressive Castle Howard stately home. Choose from 40, 67 or an adventurous 102 miles. www.action.org.uk/york-100 CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

DEVON JURASSIC CLASSIC

HQ Imperial Recreation Ground, Exmouth, EX8 1DG

How far 30/62/100 miles

Entry £18/£28/£30/£45

CA says Help raise money for Prostate Cancer UK and tuck into home-made cakes and delicacies. But before that you're going to have to take on a few Devonshire hills and navigate the lanes that weave between the Blackdown Hills and some testing gradients in the Dartmoor National Park.

[@prostateuk](https://twitter.com/prostateuk)

www.jurassicclassic.org.uk

FS/ET/ATC/EM

HAMPSHIRE RIDE IT LIPHOOK

HQ Bohunt School, Longmoor Road, Liphook, GU30 7NY

How far 15/30/60/90 miles

Entry £7.50/£18.50

CA says The Evans Ridelt events always cater for every type of rider with route distances from 15 through to 90 miles, so you can get all the family involved. Tucked onto the edge of the South Downs, Liphook is your HQ so you'll be

doing some climbing up and over the National Park.

www.evanscycles.com

FS/EM/ET

SOMERSET SADDLEBACK SODBURY SPORTIVE

HQ Chipping Sodbury Rugby Club, BS37 6GA

How far 30/60/100 miles

Entry £20/£29

CA says This route is peppered with short sharp climbs, some maxing out at 20 per cent. The ride leads you through The Cotswolds and the villages of Hawkesbury Upton, Tetbury and Uley. Here you brush by the River Severn for a flat few miles before turning back into Chipping Sodbury.

[@SodburySportive](https://twitter.com/SodburySportive)

www.sodburysportive.co.uk

CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

WARWICKSHIRE THE GREAT SHAKESPEARE RIDE

HQ Stratford Manor Hotel, CV37 0PY

How far 40/62/100 miles

Entry £25/£26/£28

CA says As if a sportive wasn't tough enough, this year's event features a Hill Climb Challenge. It comes at 17 miles on Lady Elizabeth Hill in Tysoe, so your legs will be in good shape if you fancy going for a KoM. The 1.4km climb's average gradient is eight per cent. www.thegreatshakespeareide.org.uk

FS/EM



Don't take the risk.
Protect yourself, your
bike and accessories.

cycleplan keeps you on the road



NW CHESHIRE TORELLI RONDE VAN CHESHIRE

HQ Poynton Leisure Centre, Poynton, SK12 1PU

How far 30/60/100 miles

Entry £22.50/£27

CA says This ride starts out from Poynton Leisure Centre and leads riders out onto the quiet lanes of the county of Cheshire. There is a route for all abilities — a nice 30-miler for the leisure cyclist through to a 100-miler for the keen club rider.

• @TeamTorelli

www.rondevancheshire.blogspot.co.uk
CF/FS/ET/EM

E ESSEX THE ONLY WAY

HQ Weston Homes Community Stadium, Colchester, CO4 5UP

How far 50/73/102 miles

Entry £23/£33

CA says Summer is the perfect time to get a 100-mile ride under your belt, so why not give it a go around Essex? After all it is known for its flat to rolling terrain. The route will tip over into Suffolk and through the picturesque medieval town of Lavenham. And if you're a *Game of Thrones* fan you might be interested to know that the village of Bures in Essex holds the only true account of a dragon, back in 1405.

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

CR/EM/ET/FS

SATURDAY AUGUST 22

SW DEVON WIGGLE EXMOUTH EX-TERMINATOR

HQ Westpoint Arena, Exeter, EX5 1DJ

How far 42/60/93 miles

Entry £23/£33

CA says These routes will take you on coastal roads towards the seaside town of Sidmouth, so you can fill your lungs with sea air, before turning north to head inland. The 60 and 93-mile route both venture into the edges of the Blackdown Hills before turning back through Craddock, Blackborough and Clyst St Mary to finish.

• @ukcyclingevents

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

CF/FS/EOL/EM/ET

AUGUST 22-23

NE TYNE AND WEAR RIDE 24 — NEWCASTLE 2 LONDON

HQ Newcastle TBC

How far 300 miles

Entry £199

CA says 300 miles and only 24 hours to cover them. The ride will be split into seven sections of 40-45 miles on a journey through the UK including the Yorkshire hills, the flatlands of Lincoln before arriving in the capital. Why not form a team to take on the challenge?

• @ride24hr

www.ride24hr.com

CF/FS/ET

SUNDAY AUGUST 23

SCOTLAND KEN LAIDLAW SPORTIVE

HQ Hawick Rugby Club, Mansfield Road, Hawick, TD9 8AW

How far 46/106 miles

Entry £23/£25

CA says The Ken Laidlaw sportive will traverse through the towns and villages of the Scottish Borders. The 106-miler will also take you past the largest Buddhist centre in Europe, the Samye Ling Tibetan Monastery and down quiet back roads with very little traffic. If you live nearby why not get out and ride?

www.kenlaidlawssportive.co.uk

CF/FS/EM



S WORCESTERSHIRE MALVERN MAD HATTER

HQ Three Counties Showground, WR13 6NW

How far 46/74/104 miles

Entry £25/£35

CA Our sister magazine, *Cycling Weekly*, will see the eighth, in its 10-event road series, head out around Malvern. The full 104-mile route will lead you through the

three counties of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire with a nice climb up the Malvern Ridgeway where you'll be rewarded with views over the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons of Wales.

• @cyclingweekly

www.bookmyride.co.uk

CF/FS/EOL/ET/EM

E NORFOLK PINEWOOD CLIMBS

HQ Holt Rugby Club, NR25 6QT

How far 30/60/90 miles

Entry £15/£20/£25

CA says Norfolk may be renowned for being flat but there are times on this route you'll feel like you're pedalling through the Pennines. There are 10 climbs over 33 miles clocking up 1,000 metres of total climbing and you can do up to three loops of the course — kudos to those riders who complete the tough trio. If you live nearby why not head out and see how many loops you can do?

• @cyclesportives

www.cyclesportivesuk.co.uk

EM/ET/EOL

S SUSSEX RIDE IT BRIGHTON

HQ Plumpton College, Ditchling Road, East Sussex, BN7 3AE

How far 12/30/60/90 miles

Entry £7.50/£18.50

CA says A ride around East Sussex would not be complete without the infamous climb up Ditchling Beacon and the fine views from the summit. You'll be able to glimpse the sea but won't quite make it that far as the loop heads to Lewes before heading back into Plumpton.

www.evanscycles.com

FS/EM/ET

I IRELAND THE SEAN KELLY TOUR OF WATERFORD

HQ Dungarvan Sports Centre, Co. Waterford

How far 12/50/100/160km

Entry €25/€40

CA says Ride with Sean Kelly on his home turf around southern Ireland. From the banks of the Colligan river you head westwards towards Cappoquin town to follow the River Blackwater south to blast down coastal roads. There are accommodation links on the website

for the Waterford area, so it's a great chance for a family weekend away with a ride thrown in.

www.theseankellytour.com

CF/FS/ATC

E NORFOLK TOUR DE BROADS

HQ Strumpshaw Hall, Norfolk, NR13 4HR

How far 40/73 miles

Entry £10/£20

CA says Professional cyclist Dean Downing will be riding this year's event so this could be the perfect opportunity to ride with a pro. The full route covers seven broads including Horning (River Bure), Wroxham (River Bure), Reedham (River Yare) and Stalham (River Ant) as well as 16 picturesque and quaint broads villages.

www.revolutionevents.co.uk/tour-de-

broads

FS/ET

W WALES TOUR DE MON

HQ Newry Beach, Holyhead, LL65 1YD

How far 40/75/106 miles

Entry £31.99/£35.99/£39.99

CA says The island of Anglesey hosts this sportive now in its third year. It might only be a small area of land but it packs in nippy country lanes, rolling coastal roads and even a few mountains. From its start on Newry Beach, the route makes an anticlockwise loop of the island and includes a flying mile, a timed section on the runway of RAF Valley.

• @aahevents

www.tourdemon.co.uk

FS/ET/EM

AUGUST 28-31

EM LINCOLNSHIRE THE QUEEN ELEANOR CYCLE RIDE

HQ Lincoln TBC

How far 200 miles

Entry £95/£80

CA says On the journey from Lincoln to London this 200-mile event follows the funeral procession of Queen Eleanor. If you want to ride the full four-day route you'll travel through Rutland, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. You can also join in for just one day.

www.queeneleanorcyclride.org.uk

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SUNDAY AUGUST 30

EM LEICESTERSHIRE CROSSRIDER

HQ Catmos College, Oakham, Rutland, LE15 6RP

How far 57 miles

Entry £25

CA says This off-road sportive, around Rutland and Leicestershire, is for those of you who have a cross or mountain bike propping up your garage wall. There will be some tarmac surfaces but the terrain here is mostly made up of grass and bridleways with uneven surfaces. It might be a good idea to pack a change of clothes — especially if it rains.

🔗@itpcycling

www.itpevents.co.uk

CF/FS/ET/EM

NE COUNTY DURHAM ROOF OF ENGLAND SPORTIVE — THE WINKING SHEEP

HQ Chatterbox Cafe, St John's Chapel, Weardale, DL13 1QF

How far 30/50/90 miles

Entry £25

CA says These routes will take you through the North Pennines so don't forget your climbing legs. Even the 30-mile route, though short, is packed with hills. The full 90-mile Winking Sheep route is so-called because the route, when viewed on a map, looks like a winking sheep.

www.roofofengland.co.uk

FS/EM/ET

WM WORCESTERSHIRE THE BIKING BELLES CYCLING GRAND PRIX

HQ Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire

How far 12/35/50/70 miles

Entry £25

CA says This ladies-only event has something for every ability from a 12-mile starter route to a tougher 70-mile ride that heads out through the rolling terrain of West Sussex and Hampshire. All riders get to ride a lap of the Goodwood circuit before heading out onto the open roads.

www.bikingbellesgrandprix.com

FS/CF

MONDAY AUGUST 31

C BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CHENIES VELO CLASSIQUE

HQ Chenies Manor, nr. Chorleywood, WD3 6ER

How far 30/63/100 mile

Entry £25-£28

CA says If you have a vintage steed and woollen kit then why not dust it off and head along to Penn House in Buckinghamshire. If that's not your bag then you can don your Lycra and ride your carbon bike along these routes too. There'll be a festival atmosphere back at HQ with stalls, music and local food and drink.

🔗@chilterncycling

www.chilterncyclingfestival.com

CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

C HERTFORDSHIRE HERTFORDSHIRE 100

HQ Chancellor's School, Hatfield, AL9 7BN

How far 30/64/100 miles

Entry £18/£20

CA says Most well-planned routes will offer one last testing challenge before reaching the finish line. The sting in the tail here is Little Switzerland, a series of short sharp hills just outside the village of Tewin. Chat with fellow riders once over the finish line as you tuck into some well-deserved refreshments.

🔗@Sportive_UK

www.sportiveuk.co.uk

CF/FS/ET/EM

Y NORTH YORKSHIRE SELBY THREE SWANS

HQ Yorkshire Cancer Research, Jacob Smith House, Harrogate, HG1 4DP

How far 30/66/106 miles

Entry £15/£25

CA says Even though these routes head around North Yorkshire, the organisers have found fast, flat roads so you can clock up a good time. If you've not yet done a 100-mile sportive this could be the ideal place to do it with the minimum of hills to sap your energy.

www.selbythreeswanssportive.org

FS/EM

SEPTEMBER 5-7

SE KENT LONDON TO PARIS

HQ Chelsfield Lakes Golf Club, Orpington, BR6 9BX

How far 249 miles

Entry £99/£199

CA says This three-day event will be fully supported and if you don't feel up to taking on the full 249-mile route you can take on the challenge as part of a team and share the workload. You'll also be helping to raise funds for the British Heart Foundation.

www.bhf.org.uk/londontoparis

ATC

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 5

SW DEVON MOOR 2 SEA SPORTIVE

HQ Exeter Racecourse, EX6 7XS

How far 60/104/180 km

Entry £30/£37

CA says Dartmoor is a tough place to cycle with 20 per cent climbs common on the moors. There will be the chance to claim your KoM or QoM as you take on a timed climb up the infamous Haytor — a 5.4km climb with an average gradient of six per cent. A good mix of coastal and rolling moorland views.

🔗@JustEventsLtd

www.moor2sea.com

CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 6

E ESSEX ACTION ESSEX 100

HQ Gosfield School, Halstead Road, Gosfield, CO9 1PF

How far 37/68/104 miles

Entry £55

CA says It's the only way if you want to

get some miles in before autumn arrives. The north Essex countryside is a great opportunity for a flat, fast ride. You'll make your way around Dedham Vale AONB and push up to Sudbury before returning via the large village of Great Bardfield to Colchester.

www.action.org.uk/essex-100

CF/FS/ET/ATS/EM

Y YORKSHIRE BLUE GIRAFFE BICYCLES TOUR DE NORTH YORK MOORS

HQ Middlesbrough Cycle Centre,

Prissick Park, TS4 3SA

How far 30/70 miles

Entry £15/£20

CA says If you want to push yourself on the North York Moors why not head along to this event. The 70-mile route has 1,646 metres of total climbing which is made up of lots of short, steep climbs — you may find yourself out of the saddle more than you're in it!

🔗@bluegiraffe1

www.bluegiraffebicycles.co.uk

CF/FS/EM

S HAMPSHIRE GSD GIANT

HQ The Petersfield School, Petersfield, GU32 3LU

How far 30/60/100 miles

Entry £25/£30/£35

CA says Whatever route you choose, you'll meander along quiet lanes through quaint villages between the South Downs and the Meon Valley. You should also enjoy views over the Solent as the routes just brush the coastline.

🔗@aGSDGiant

www.GSDGiant.org.uk

CF/FS/ATC/EM

EM LINCOLNSHIRE LE PETIT GRAND PRIX

HQ Yarrowburgh Leisure Centre, LN1 3SP

How far 30/51/81/107 miles

Entry £20/£27

CA says If you missed out on the Lincoln Grand Prix Sportive and the famous climb of the Michaelgate cobbles then the event's little sister could well be the next best thing. Le Petit Grand Prix travels through Lincoln and The Wolds. If you are left wanting more, return next June and take on the tougher version — including those cobbles!

🔗@itpcycling

www.itpevents.co.uk

CF/FS/ET/EM

SE SURREY MACMILLAN CYCLETTA SURREY

HQ Loseley Park, GU3 1HS

How far 20/50/100km

Entry £38

CA says Sorry boys, this is for the ladies. From the grounds of the historic manor of Loseley Park you can decide to cycle 20, 50 or 100km. This event, now in its second year, forms part of a series of five events to help get you in the saddle.

🔗@HumanRaceEvents

www.humanrace.co.uk

CF/ET/FS/ATC

NW GREATER MANCHESTER MANCHESTER 100

HQ Wythenshawe Park, Wythenshawe Park, M23 0AB

How far 62/100 miles

Entry TBC

CA says This relaxed charity ride could be a good environment to tackle your first 100-mile sportive. The Cheshire Plains makes up a good chunk of this route that takes in Northwich, Tattenhall, the market town of Nantwich at the halfway point and Wilmslow before looping to the finish at Manchester's Wythenshawe Park.

🔗@BikeEventsTeam

www.bike-events.com/manchester100

FS/ET/ATC

Y NORTH YORKSHIRE SELBY THREE SWANS SPORTIVE

HQ Yorkshire Cancer Research, Harrogate, HG1 4DP

How far 30/66/106 miles

Entry £15-£25

CA says Help raise money for Yorkshire Cancer Research whatever your ability. The 30-mile route is ideal if you're new to events as it's held on flat roads. For more of a challenge, sign-up for either the 66 or 106-mile routes that take you through the Vale of York.

🔗@3SwansSportive

www.selbythreeswanssportive.org

CF/FS/ET/ATC/EM

C NORTHAMPTONSHIRE THE GREAT GORILLA RIDE

HQ Gorilla Firm Cycling, Oundle Wharf, PE8 4DE

How far 50/75/110miles

Entry £20/£26

CA says Back for a third year, the three routes will once again be hitting the tarmac in Oundle and the quiet country Northamptonshire lanes. At the finish line a hot lunch and pint from the Nene Valley Brewery will be waiting for you. That should be enough motivation to keep the pedals turning!

🔗@thegorillafirm

www.gorillafirmcycling.com/pages/sportive

FS/ET/ATC/EM

NE NORTHUMBERLAND WIGGLE NORTHERN ANGEL

HQ Kirkley Hall, Ponteland, NE20 0AQ

How far 67/80/94 miles

Entry £23/£33

CA says One for the northerners as UK Cycling set up its start line in Kirkley, Newcastle. From Northumberland National Park to Harwood Forest on to the commons of Rayless, Corsenside, Hareshaw and Chester, it will be one beautiful rolling green landscape to the next. A few of the climbs will reach double digits but the massage team will be waiting to soothe your tired limbs, back at HQ.

www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk

CF/FS/EOL/ET/EM

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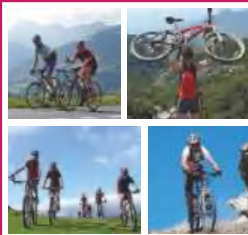
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Your turn

Nice and easy does it

Spinning through a village in a flash takes all the fun out of savouring the English countryside, argues **Jon Pettman**

Cycling offers different aspects of enjoyment; that's part of its appeal. Some cyclists enjoy the speed and satisfaction of covering distance; others prefer the ambience, or what others might call the context.

I don't just enjoy cycling, but also what I am cycling past, savouring the scenes and situations that England has to offer: lovely villages, varied and historic architecture, hedgerows (many countries don't have them), winding lanes, picture book scenery — and a public transport network to take me to the beginning and back.

A typical journey will start with going by train to a drop-off point. If the station is on a main line, I will probably stay for a few minutes and watch the expresses hurtling through. Their speed makes one wonder how they stay on the rails, especially if they approach or leave the station round curves. When at last I get going, I may misread the map, which means retracing a few hundred yards. Never mind; I have seen much more than I would otherwise have done.

To avoid having to memorise the route, and make mistakes, I make many stops to check the map to see where to go next. I will savour that spot and thus see another corner of England. If an uphill stretch proves too demanding, I walk, enjoying the change in motion, not to mention the relief to my saddle area.

After another two miles or so, I will come to a village and stroll past the shops, noting what a small settlement has to offer. Some remote grocery shops are surprisingly well stocked, but the prices can be a little high. I query a banana costing 35p and get a lesson in economics. "Small quantity means we don't get the discounts available to the supermarkets." Oh well, it's natural food; and money isn't everything.

A fine piece of Georgian or Victorian architecture may merit extra attention. Noble proportions and sash windows tell of a more elegant age. What was once a rectory is a reminder of the passage of time and culture. It used to be the place for intimate discussions as engaged couples spoke of their love and faith with the vicar before talking about the wedding; bereaved people were comforted; solemn and joyful occasions were planned. Now, someone just lives there.

A feast for the eyes

Then I come to an escarpment, with houses built above the landscape. I spend several minutes feasting my eyes. It's possible to see for several miles across a wide valley, with its fields, woodland, roads and railway. What looks like a toy train passes silently through distant patches of woodland; the livery makes for a splash of colour against the greens and browns of trees, fields and crops. I ask myself:

"Would I like to have my dwelling there?" Can you live on a view?

Never mind. I carry on and after a while find a game of cricket. I pause and watch several overs, surprised that the batsmen don't better exploit the modest level of bowling. Maybe the deliveries are more ferocious when viewed at the receiving end. It's always easier to bat when you're not at the crease. The setting reminds me of the account of the cricket match in A.G. Macdonell's *England, Their England* — required reading for anyone who wants a hilarious picture of rustics and their sport.

Or I might chance upon a game of football. I'm told it's a needle match between two local villages. There are at least five spectators. The elderly referee looks a bit ruffled at having to run around during such a tense encounter. Maybe he was chosen for wisdom rather than athleticism. No controversial penalties liven the occasion, so I move on.

Another modest distance, and I will stop where there is a seat — in a bus shelter perhaps — and have lunch. I take my time, relishing what I have prepared to suit my tastes. The sandwich fillings are hardly exotic but then, as the saying goes, hunger is a good sauce.

Some minutes later, I come to a small shop selling ice cream, so I sit outside, enjoying this sweet culmination to my meal, watching the passing traffic.

A little further on I reach another village. If the church is open, I will go inside, note anything of interest, sit in a pew and read from the Bible or a prayer book, savouring the eternities amid what is transient.

By now a little tired, I realise that there's a canal on the route to my destination, so I join the nice level tow path. I stop at several locks to watch boats come through. I note that the gates are so finely balanced that a four-year-old — he can't be much more — can push one by himself.

Eventually I will get to a place where I can catch a train home, or maybe a bus if I'm on my folder bike. In three hours or so, I will have done about 12 miles. I once did 20, but that was exceptional. The diverse elements offered by the average English county, especially in the warmer months, provide situations that take time to savour — and provide a host of happy memories.

John Pettman is a retired school teacher living in Eastbourne



Illustration: Chris Watson

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